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# BRENDAN BEHAN'S BRAWLING SELF-PORTRAIT

# CONFESSIONS OF AN IRISH REBEL

A PENETRATING AND ASTONISHING LOOK AT OUR DISINTEGRATING WORLD FROM THE INSIDE VIEWPOINT OF THE EARLIEST DROP-OUT.

"...BRENDAN BEHAN AT HIS MOST FLAVORSOME..."
—*SATURDAY REVIEW*

Originally published in hardcover by Bernard Geis Associates

## THE MANY SIDES OF BRENDAN BEHAN

**PLAYWRIGHT**...the man who electrified millions around the world with *The Quare Fellow* and *The Hostage*.

**WRITER**...spellbinding teller of tales tall and otherwise, and author of the international bestseller, *Borstal Boy*.

**PERSONALITY**...robust, gentle, ribald, compassionate, a master of Irish humor yet afflicted with the Devil's own temper.

**REBEL**...excommunicated by his church, hounded by the enemies of his country, and loved by every man and woman who treasures the dream of a free homeland.

LANCER
CONTEMPORARY
BOOKS

# BRENDAN BEHAN'S
# CONFESSIONS OF AN IRISH REBEL

LANCER BOOKS NEW YORK

DEDICATION:

TO RAE

without whose help this book
would not have been written
until at least A.D. 2000—
many years after my death.

A LANCER BOOK

# CONFESSIONS OF AN IRISH REBEL

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# FOREWORD

It was in the spring of 1957, seven years before his death, that I first met Brendan Behan. He had come to the offices of his London publishers, Hutchinson, to deliver the manuscript of *Borstal Boy*. I knew little about him, except that he was the Irish author of an extremely good play, *The Quare Fellow*, and that he was the star of one of the most talked-about television interviews of 1956.

When I met him, he was standing next to a table, a formidable figure with his unruly hair cascading over his forehead and his clothes arrayed around him as best they could without the help of the wearer.

We were introduced—Brendan's introductions to the opposite sex could hardly be described as formal—and I was asked to give a *précis* of my life up to that very moment. He listened quietly and with genuine interest, interrupting only when he felt I had glossed over an important detail. When he learned that I came from Sussex, he was obviously delighted. Apparently he had been extremely well treated in a Sussex prison, and he had a warm regard for anyone coming from that county.

The introductions over, Brendan, whose thirst took small account of licensing hours, called for a drink. With vicarage garden-party decorum, I inquired whether it would be tea or coffee.

"Do you call that a drink?" he roared, interpolating a

stream of unbridled Anglo-Saxon words which would not normally be heard in a publisher's office. And so began the first of my many lessons in nonconformity. Somehow I managed to get hold of a bottle of whiskey, and I returned triumphantly to the office, as much exhilarated by the act of procuring the bottle as the man himself by the act of emptying it.

For the rest of the afternoon I was entertained by numerous stories, which were not altogether easy for the uninitiated to follow, for Brendan had a most captivating way of unexpectedly breaking into song. He had an unlimited repertoire of folksongs and Dublin ballads, which he would sing enchantingly by the hour in a light, lilting tenor.

Then suddenly, without a word of warning, as if on castors, he glided to the door and off down the passage, shouting "*Slan leat*" to the wide-eyed astonishment of the passers-by. I raced after him as I remembered the precious manuscript, still not delivered, only to receive the casually imparted information that he had "left it at the BBC" and he would go and get it. Sometime later I started out to look for him, but I did not have to go very far. I heard his voice coming from *The George*, singing, somewhat more lustily than before, the same Dublin ballads.

Under the rumbustious bravado, Brendan was courteous, considerate and absurdly generous. Every person in the pub that evening was clustered round him as though drawn by a magnet, and it would have taken a bigger fool than myself not to discover the largeness of the heart that ticked behind the showman's mask.

I had simply started out on a business mission, but in a matter of hours I lived a lifetime. It was a most remarkable experience, and to those who poke the finger of scorn at objects of popular adulation, I can only say it was as though a powerful light had suddenly gone on. It wasn't necessarily that things were dull before, but that Brendan's presence produced an overwhelming current

of electricity quite beyond the ordinary. He was not then a world-renowned figure, and his exploits were not yet hot copy for the morning's editions. He was a man being himself, more alive than the rest of us, and our batteries were charged with a borrowed vitality that, for me at any rate, changed the whole conception of life.

Throughout the following year, my connection with Brendan was mainly that of a public relations officer, and it was in this capacity that I began to pierce through his external ferocity and to discover the innocence, the tenderness and the sensitivity behind it. Before any public appearance he would assume a completely different personality. As we neared the television studios or the newspaper offices for an interview, I could almost see him building up the bricks of the wall that protected him from himself. Beads of perspiration would break out on his forehead, and he would be cruel, abusive and arrogant.

He felt he had to live up to his reputation as the tough IRA rebel, the man who would assault not only others but himself as well, rather than conform. When the strain of impersonation became too much, a bout of drinking would follow. But when he realized this armor was unnecessary, he became almost childlike in his frankness and candor.

With the publication of *Borstal Boy* in October, 1958, Brendan's success was assured. My chief recollection of these days is the genuine pleasure that Brendan got from reading the reviews. It was almost as if he was no longer afraid to look in and recognize himself, and I think he was nearer at that time to establishing a real relationship with himself than he ever became again. Perhaps if he had managed it, the self-destructiveness that he carried within him would only have come to the surface spasmodically and certainly would not have killed him. I do not think that he wanted to die, only to stop living the life he had made for himself.

At any rate, at this time he did not snatch for the

whiskey bottle, nor impatiently throw the clippings down, as I saw him do so many times afterwards. He sat in the chair quietly reading them, unafraid, and was both impressed and delighted with himself. Every now and again, he would point out a particularly good review and say, "That's what so-and-so thinks of me," and his head would lean a further two degrees toward his shoulder as the grin spread all over his face.

With world-wide acclaim for *The Hostage*, which had been produced by Theatre Workshop in the week preceding publication of *Borstal Boy*, Brendan began to devote less of his time to writing. More and more did he parade the public figure of the irrepressible drunken Irishman, and the newspapers helped enthusiastically. And as the column inches added up, they somehow managed to convey, for the first time, the impression that the end was as inevitable as the end of Dylan Thomas.

With his wife, Beatrice, always a patient and steadying influence, he stampeded through Paris where *The Hostage*, chosen to represent Great Britain and later to win the award of best play of the year, was being presented at the Paris Théâtre des Nations Festival.

Still the column inches mounted with stories of brashness and flamboyance, and the hangers-on became more numerous, not so much on account of his undoubted talent, for which life meted out a cruel revenge, but because he was a "character," a species of man distinctly rare. Repeated demands from both publishers and agents to fulfill his contracts were ignored. His solution of the problem was rather primitive: when he saw the publisher's representative in the street, he would quickly cross over to the other side.

Finally, I was asked to go over to Dublin and be, in Brendan's own words, his "literary midwife." Although, at the time, I was unaware that the diversion from my role as publicity manager would be more than a temporary one, I was happy in the knowledge that he had assumed I was the natural choice for the assignment, and

that by the end of it he seemed so delighted with the partnership. Some time later I returned with *Brendan Behan's Island* and the slightly raveled air of having been through labor myself.

Shortly afterwards he came to London, and a drinking bout took place that terminated in a hospital. For the following nine months, Brendan, perhaps too acutely aware of his instability and emotional problems, struggled successfully to resist the temptation of drink. A new seed of hope sprang up inside of him, and he began writing again—a third play—without any help or instigation.

But it was not to last. In America, where he was lionized, he began to drink again, and although he made repeated attempts to stop, he was fighting a losing battle as his physical being and willpower weakened. Still, he knew that working was essential to him—the only force stronger than his desire for drink—so he asked me to join him in New York and help him write the second part of his autobiography.

*Confessions of an Irish Rebel* was recorded on tape during Brendan's last visit to America, and was transcribed and edited after his death. It may, consequently, lack the final polish Brendan would have wished. But it is all his, and no one, I think, will mistake it, or find the hand of a once-proper British lady in it.

Perhaps nothing does greater credit to the magnitude of the man than that he chose to work with a person who held totally opposing beliefs and politics and who came from a country which he had fought against bitterly—both physically and mentally—at no small cost to himself.

Brendan never forgave my being English. But in the final reckoning, he was too big a person to notice it.

RAE JEFFS,
*Uckfield,*
*Sussex.*
*May, 1965.*

# ONE

"You're for the Governor in the morning," said this dreary redheaded little Welsh Methodist bastard of a screw.

"Thanks for telling me," said I in an almost English accent, as sarcastically as I politely could, "but I'm not for 'im in the morning or any other bloody time, you little Welsh puff."

"Bee-hann," he screams, "get in that cell!"

I had been in this Borstal Institution in England for IRA activities for close on three years, and my treatment there, for which I have nothing but praise, had made me kind of cocky and sure of myself.

The lads stood by, looking at me with a fearful joy as I grinned and went in the cell.

In the morning I was opened up and slopped out as usual and then another Welsh orderly, not the ginger-headed Judas of the previous evening, brought me my breakfast and told me the incredible news.

"You're going out today, Paddy. We've known it all week, but we wanted to keep it as a surprise for you so we could give you a proper cheer-off."

Jesus, Joseph and Mary, Mother of God, I said in my mind, this is a day for singing, but I would have liked to celebrate it in a more Christian fashion than drinking tea.

As we walked along the bare but friendly corridors to

the Governor's office, I could not help wishing that it was my old Governor, C. A. Joyce, who would be shaking my hand, but he had been replaced recently by a new man, not a bad one at that, but in my opinion not so imaginative as Joyce, or his wife, who was a painter and a good one.

I was put in the Governor's office, and I stood to attention and said:

"Behan, Brendan Francis, 3501537662."

The new Governor of His Majesty's Borstal Institution of the Day, as he elected to call it, shook my hand.

"Behan, you're being released this morning."

"Thank you, sir," I replied.

And he took me into an adjoining room where, together with another man, I saw my old friend Sergeant Sharpe of the Liverpool CID.

"Hello, Brendan," he said. "It's come at last. At least they've made a man of you. When I pinched you in Liverpool, you were a skinny kid. Now, you're a fine man."

"That, Sergeant," says I, "is due to our vitaminized bread."

So his colleague grunted, who was a young man of about twenty-three.

"Oh, you get vitaminized bread here, do you, while the people outside are starving. And some of the troops are not getting such good treatment as you fellows are."

"For your information," I answered, "about twenty-five per cent of the population, of what you would call the criminal population, of this Institution fought on the beaches of France, more particularly at Dunkirk. I'm not aware that you ever did anything like that."

"No," he said, in his arrogant Limey way, "nor neither did you."

"I never claimed to be an Englishman," said I. "I'm an Irish Republican."

And I swear I would have knocked the fughing bejasus out of him had not Sergeant Sharpe intervened as he had on a previous occasion when I was first arrested in

Liverpool in 1939. He had led the raid that had put me in this kip and had stopped some of the younger, more enthusiastic members of the Force from doing a job on me, and he had treated me rather like a father does a foolish child.

"Now take it easy, Brendan. You're all right. You're going to get a nice little trip out of this."

I was about to answer but he held up his hand in protest.

"Don't speak to me about these things, Brendan. I was on the Somme."

"No doubt you were, Sergeant," I said, "and I'm sure you gave a good account of yourself."

"Now I've a little document I've got to read to you."

So he said—and it's a pity you can't hear my imitation of a Liverpool accent because I happen to be rather good at it:

" 'Prevention of Violence, Temporary Provisions Act 1939. To Brendan Behan: Take notice that His Majesty's Secretary of State for Home Affairs has made an order requiring you to leave Great Britain forthwith until further notice of this order has been made, by reason of your instigation or preparation of acts of violence in Great Britain designed to influence government policy or public opinion with respect to Irish affairs.' "

"Hear, hear!" I said.

"Shut up, you little bastard," the sergeant replied. "I haven't finished reading it."

"Go ahead," I said, "I'm listening."

" 'Section 1 (2) of the Act empowers the Secretary of State to make an expulsion order if he is reasonably satisfied that a person is concerned in the preparation or instigation of acts of violence as described above, and that he is not a person who has been ordinarily resident in Great Britain throughout the last twenty years, or in the case of a person under the age of twenty years, throughout his life.

" 'If you object that there are no grounds, or no suffi-

cient grounds for the making of the expulsion order against you, you may within forty-eight hours of the service of this Notice upon you, send representations in writing to the Secretary of State stating the reason for your objection. If you make such representation, you will be detained in custody pending the reconsideration and disposal of your case.

" 'If you do not make representations within forty-eight hours of the service of this Notice upon you, you will as soon as may be thereafter placed on board a ship about to leave Great Britain.' "

Then he repeated:

"So take notice that you will be placed aboard a ship about to leave Great Britain."

"Twice," I said with a grin.

"Shut up, you little get! Within forty-eight hours. Now," said the sergeant, "do you accept service of this order?"

"I most certainly do," I answered.

He put his arm around me, smiling gently as he did so.

"In next to no time we'll have you as smart as paint so that even your mother won't know you after this long time. Run up to the Part-Worn Stores and fix yourself up with some decent clothes for the trip."

As I faced the Part-Worn screw I had the inclination for the last time to stand to the mat, state my registered number, name, age and religious denomination, but he was a good man and was only doing his job like the rest of them. He looked every inch the Englishman, and I felt he would ride a horse if he had one.

"Paddy," he said, "we're not going to give you an ordinary discharge suit. We couldn't get your measure in time. This came on us all of a sudden. The Home Secretary seems to have made up his mind very fast. We're going to give you a sports coat and flannels and a couple of shirts, some ties, shoes and socks."

I went up, and for the first time in over two years I put on long trousers. They felt very awkward, as if I was

wearing two blankets round my legs, but it was smart enough I'm sure. The only trouble was that the flannels were a bit tight, and I had it in mind not to come in them. Certainly the Borstal boy assisting the Part-Worn screw had seemed a bit anxious about it.

On my way back to the Governor's office I met some of my old chinas, and I felt a kind of sadness that I would no longer rib them, nor they me, as we had done over so many months. For a moment we were all united in our sadness, and then I left.

The Governor was waiting for me, and I asked him if I could say goodbye to a few special friends and in particular to the Matron.

But he was adamant.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "You'll only say goodbye to me."

And Sergeant Sharpe, who was to be my escort, coughed fiercely in the doorway to give me the nod to mind what I was about.

"Goodbye," I said civilly enough, "and a soldier's farewell to you."

He shook my hand again.

"Thank you, Behan. That's very kind of you."

Being Anglo-Indian, he didn't understand that this meant: "Hello, how are you and fugh you," but Sergeant Sharpe understood, and he laughed heartily when we came out the door.

We went down the steps into the car, and I just caught a glimpse out of the corner of my eye of Matron frantically waving a half-knitted sock at me. It wasn't a bad picture, at that, to carry away with me.

The only other person who saw me going off was an agricultural screw, a cockney who was called, for some strange reason, Pony Moore. He waved his hand at me.

"Good luck, Paddy."

"Good luck, Pony," and then I remembered that the Governor would be listening so I shouted: "Goodbye Mr. Moore," very respectfully, because you were not

supposed to call officers by their Christian names, first names or nicknames.

This was the last I saw of Borstal.

The fresh cold wind that was blowing as we left turned into a blizzard as we stood on Woodbridge Station waiting to get the train for London. I don't know why it is, but whoever designs these stations should be made by law to stand on them on cold wintry mornings, so that they get the full benefit of their ingenuity.

I reflected on the excellence of my condition.

"The wicked," I thought happily, "prosper in a wicked world."

But my good humor changed, for didn't I have to share a carriage with some half-idiot from East Jesus, Kansas, or Balham's Ass or some such, who was giving out the pay about the hardships endured by the British. I could have told him about the hardships of his compatriots back in the Institution, but with Sergeant Sharpe listening, I didn't like to push my luck. Instead I sat back in the corner of the carriage, putting the day through my thoughts. It was all very good.

When we reached Euston there was an air raid. I had heard the sirens many times back in Borstal and seen the planes but somehow this was different and I was strangely afraid. I had been at Euston Station before on my way to Feltham Boys' Prison and the architecture isn't exactly conducive to confidence with all that glass overhead. And I'd learned about building, all my people being in that industry, so I knew what to expect when the big bang came.

But all the people I saw had the appearance of hard work and walked methodically, saving their energy for the crucial moment. I gave a good imitation I think.

"Come on," said Sharpe, "look alive there. You know I'm supposed to put the handcuffs on you."

"Oh," I said, "put them on if you like."

The sergeant grinned.

"I don't think you're worth it. Instead, we'll go and find something to eat."

"How about something to drink?"

"Well," he said, "we may see about that too."

So we went into the station restaurant and we ate a large feed, and being eighteen years old I was able to do the meal more than justice, because, by God, it was a terrible meal. It finished up with a thing called Victory Duff, which was the most awful muck. I think Hitler must have sent it to the English. But they were surrounded by U-boats at the time, and they were doing the best they could under difficult circumstances.

After the meal we made an odd adjournment here and there, and having plenty of the right stuff inside us, we caught the train for Liverpool.

I struck out a bar of a song and withdrew it immediately. Sitting opposite me was a red-faced man with an ugly strong face, and he was caressing not one bottle of malt, but two.

I nudged the sergeant.

"Get an eyeful of that," I whispered. "How about you and me getting in on the act? And furthermore," says I, "I'll mark your card for you. I see by the label on the case that he's a cop, and even if I've nothing in common with this whore's melt, I'm not beyond hunker-sliding to screw-bastards when it suits me."

"Very well, Brendan," he replied. "Go ahead and see what you can do."

In the matter of alcohol principles are few, so I got up and stretched myself lazily and eased myself down in the spare seat next door to my new-found friend. We got into conversation easily about the price of things, the black-out, racetracks and greyhound tracks, women and the looks of girls in Liverpool. I told him I was on my way to Liverpool with my uncle, pointing to Sergeant Sharpe as I did so, to join the Navy.

Being a particularly thick cop, he didn't ask why I didn't join the Navy in London.

"Oh," he said, "with your uncle, is that right?"

"Yes," I replied. "Actually, to tell the truth, I'm only telling you confidentially for you seem a respectable man, my uncle is a detective officer."

And I raised my eyes as I spoke as though butter wouldn't ever melt in my mouth.

"Jesus, that's a funny thing. I'm a Jack myself."

And hypocrite that I am, I even looked surprised.

"Ask your uncle, would he care for a drink with me?"

I leaned over to Sharpe and gave him the wink as I spoke.

"Uncle Hughie, I was telling this bloke we're going up for me to join the Navy in Liverpool."

The other old one interrupted. "Good luck to you lad." Then he said to Sharpe, "Would you have a drop of Scotch with me? We're in the same line of business I understand from your nephew here. It calls for a celebration."

"Certainly," said Sharpe. "Actually I'm a sergeant in the Liverpool CID."

"Very pleased to meet you," said our companion. "I'm with the Blackpool CID." And he turned lovingly to me, and I was grateful for the growing dusk so he couldn't see the shame in my eyes as he said: "So this young man is going away to fight for King and Country. I think we should give him a drink too."

"Well," said Sharpe, "I know he'd be able for it."

We all drank and smoked merrily into the dark. There was a blue pilot light at the top of the carriage, and I could just see the outline of the face of the Blackpool cop drawing with great pleasure on his cigarette.

After a little while I got a bit tired, but I wanted to piss and I knew I would not be allowed to walk along the corridor alone. I equally did not want to spoil our story at this stage of the game, even though we had had the message. All the same I badly wanted one and Sharpe must have sensed it for he said, "Want a walk, Paddy?" And he got up and took me to the toilet.

"You first. Age before ignorance," I said, although by this time I was breaking my neck.

Sharpe made way for me at the door. "Right there, Brendan," he said, "in you go and no funny business trying to jump out of the window and scarper."

I was grateful to him and left the door slightly open so he would understand, and when I came out, we walked slowly with a great peace back to the carriage.

I looked at them both and thought they would have made good drinking companions in any other walk of life and reflected with sadness on the change that must come over them when they were on a job. I am not fond of police anywhere.

At Liverpool we were supposed to go straight to the jail, where I was to be kept for the night to wait to go to the boat, which was not at Liverpool for some reason but at Holyhead, in the morning. But we called in to pay our respects to the local publicans on the way, and never being one to miss whatever drop might be stirring, I got so drunk that they wouldn't let me into the prison. That's the first time I was ever refused admittance to the wick. And for being drunk!

"What do you want me to do with him?" remarked Sharpe sarcastically. "Register him at the Selphi Hotel?"

Which is about the largest and smartest hotel in Liverpool and is frequented by all the racegoers to Aintree—a four-star kip, whatever that means.

Sharpe then handed the station sergeant my deportation papers, and after a whispered conversation I was taken in. I waved goodbye to Sharpe, who told me he would see me in the morning, and I was escorted along a dark corridor by the station sergeant and a Scottish bastard of a screw down a flight of stairs to an open door.

Being in the humor, I sang them a few bars of the song about the Invincibles and was just about to break into the sad but lovely "Kevin Barry" when the Scottish screw said:

"Shut up, you sloppy Irish mick, and get in the cell. And if I hear any more of your bloody row in the night, I'll come down personally and attend to the matter myself."

They banged out the door, and I could hear their footsteps retreating in the distance.

I looked around the room. Bare concrete walls and floor again and the same wooden bench for a bed and a pillow of the same material. I coiled myself up, put my jacket behind my head and pulled the coarse blankets over me. Though I contemplated committing a mortal sin, I was too drunk, and I fell into a deep sleep.

Waking, I didn't wonder where I was. There were noises of key-jangling and slopping out. A face looked in the spy-hole. I knew him, and I'd know the tenth generation of him for he was a miserable swine of a screw whom I'd known from two years previously.

He turned the key in the lock and stood facing me.

"Come on Bee-hann. Down to the washhouse. You're going home. If I had my way, I would do in the lot of you IRA men."

"You did your best in the Troubles," I replied. "But I've a better home to go to than you have, bejasus."

Jesus look down on you, I said in my own mind, if I ever get you in a place where I can give you a kick in the ballocks, but I said nothing more. I had a hangover as high as St. George's Hall of the Liver Building in Liverpool.

He took me to the day-room, where Sergeant Sharpe was waiting, and I was given back my cigarettes and matches which had been lifted from me the night before. Sharpe put the handcuffs on me, for the sake of propriety, he whispered, and we caught the train to Holyhead.

As soon as we arrived, he let me off the hook and introduced me to a lot of cops and we began discussing Rugby football, a favorite pastime of mine, in the bar of the Ship Hotel. We had so many glasses of chat that whole tribes of Nazis could have walked into the bloody place for all the cops cared by the time they'd got a few stiffeners into

themselves and us. And we had plenty of Scotch, because they were well in with the stewards of the place.

I was the last up the gangplank, roaring and singing, and I fell in with a whole crowd of Irishmen. They were curious to know why I was the last on board.

"Because," says I, "I'm a deportee. I've just served a sentence of nearly three years in England."

"Oh, Jesus," said a well-dressed man of about thirty-six in a Cork accent. "That must have been terrible."

"Well," I answered truthfully, "it was mixed-middling. At the beginning it wasn't so hot, but after that I was better treated than I was ever in my life before."

So some of them liked this, but more of them didn't. But they all agreed that I was a hero and a patriot and threw buckets of drink into me. And we arrived at Dún Laoire, commonly known as Dunleary and known to some as Kingstown, and it was good to see the waves lash up and over the East Pier on this wintry morning.

The sun was in mind to come out but having a look at the weather it was in, lost heart and went back in again. Through the haze I could not see "the fair hills of Holy Ireland" but I could smell the tang of generations of me, and I choked back the tears that were now pressing and eager to be free. All the familiar landmarks were there as if I'd never left them, and I had them all counted in my mind as surely as if they were paraded in front of me.

"Where is your travel permit?" said an immigration man.

"Here it is," I said, handing him my deportation order.

"What in the name of Jesus is that?"

"That's the only kind of travel permit I have got, you good-for-nothing civil servant bastard."

He read it, looked at it and handed it back to me.

"Are you Irish?"

"No," I said, "as a matter of a fact, I'm a Yemenite Arab."

Two detectives came forward who were evidently there to meet me.

"Apparently he *is* Brendan Behan," they said.

The immigration officer shook my hand and his hard face softened.

"*Céad míle fáilte romhat abhaile.*"

A hundred thousand welcomes home to you.

I could not answer. There are no words and it would be impertinence to try. I walked down the gangway. I was free.

# TWO

I MUST have got on the dirtiest train in Ireland because most of them are excellent and quite clean. But this one that took me from Dún Laoire to Dublin was a filthy-looking yoke. I pulled down the window and poked out my head. Though the ground was frosty it was going to be a beautiful day, and the sun had taken more heart now and had begun to shine. I could see familiar houses and people busying themselves with the moments of the day, and I marveled at the greenness of the fields and the trees in regular rows that seemed to stretch for miles. They had lost their leaves in readiness for the winter.

There was a hatchet-faced old strap in the carriage with me with a young clean-looking youth with a pile of papers on his knee, and two Dublin men in the corner, who were moaning their lot throughout the entire trip. I swear that if you put some people down at the Ritz with a million nicker and a beautiful girl thrown in to boot, they would still find some bloody thing to crap about.

As the train pulled in to Dublin station I opened the east side carriage door and was over the barrier as quick as you please. It seemed like a century since I had walked up the road to my home in Crumlin, a Dublin Corporation housing estate. There were gleams of sun coming through the trees and the frosty air had a great smell of smoke in it. For fifteen minutes or so I walked around, but the clock

was not made that could measure time at that moment.

My father and mother were there to greet me and they embraced me and so did my little sister Carmel, who is now married to a Scottish carpenter and lives in England.

I had thought many times of home and my family when I was in Borstal, and I had pictured them, when the frost was crisp under foot, sitting round the fire in Dublin where there were hearths that would welcome me when I did get out. Now it was as if I had never been away. My mother cried a little and told me about Nancy at the *Morning Star*, and about what Craigavad said to the mendicity man when he brought round the porridge —"and I wouldn't have minded so much but he was using that old walking-stick to stir it with"—and about Mick, avic, who only came there to sell his breakfast for the price of a glass of chat. And amongst it all she slipped it in.

"Maureen is dying from consumption."

Hell and heaven and despair and presumption and hope. We had talked together, we laughed together, we did the things that young boys and girls do together. I had been in this girl's house and I knew her father and her mother. I'd fought alongside her brothers and we had shared the same battlefields of the poor.

How could death come to one so young?

I went over to her home which was a vegetable shop in Benburg Street, down near Guinness's Brewery in the heart of Dublin. When I got there, Maureen was selling a cabbage by the head to an old one, and to tell the honest truth, for a moment I wasn't sure whether it was her or her sister ten years older that I was seeing, for when I left home, Maureen was little more than a child, and now she was a tall, brown-haired, blue-eyed woman.

"Hello, Brendan," she said, "and how are you?"

"Not so bad, kid," I replied as I walked through the shop into the kitchen beyond.

There was no one at home but she followed me through and asked what I would like for my dinner, it being Fri-

day. She was never sure, she said, what religion I was, although all belonging to me were Catholics since A.D. 432. But I knew fish was scarce, so I said I was a Protestant and she gave me a steak. Later she discovered I was not a Protestant, whatever else I was, but a Catholic, and she said I had sold Jesus Christ for a pound of beef. She apologized for the state of the rooms, explaining that her two brothers, Eddie and Paddy, were interned and as her father was an invalid, there was no one that could do wallpapering. As this was my trade at the time, she asked me if I would ever sling the joint.

"Sure," I said, "sure I will, Maureen."

But we fell into talking about this and that and me telling her stories of great bravery for the cause in England and her sitting there and taking it all in. And then she tells me of the confessions of an IRA chief of staff which her father swore were Gospel truth and which to me were absolutely nonsensical.

"Brendan," she said, "I object to your views and your bad language. I've a mind to ask you to go."

In fact when a friend of hers arrived, Maureen asked him to put me out.

"Get out, Brendan Behan," the friend said.

"Jesus," I replied, "I've not opened my fughing mouth."

But I didn't go, and over the days I slung the joint and I was happy to be with her. We talked quietly while I worked, and I was delighted to find that the last three years had not diminished my skill. The rooms looked neat and trim and a peace descended that I had not known.

Shortly after this Maureen was sent to Crooksling Sanatorium in the Dublin mountains, and I went up to see this girl with whom I had a very pure relationship. I am a cowardly man by nature, and to go there I had to take a couple of drinks, and when I saw her so small and lonely in the stark, ether-smelling ward of the hospital, I knew that I loved her very deeply. I brought her some flowers

and I sang a couple of songs, and she seemed extremely happy. Which in some ways implies that the Catholic religion might be the true one. I had been extra religious as a kid myself, but later I had had difficulties with myself and sex and had seen my friends excommunicated and heard about my father being excommunicated with thousands of others. Now I had been excommunicated myself but I suppose at heart I am a daylight atheist, for I would not like to die without a priest.

I kissed Maureen very chastely on the lips.

"Goodbye," I said, "goodbye." Because I knew I would not see her again. I'm not an amateur doctor, for Jesus' sake, but I knew I was in the presence of death, and in one so young, and with whom I was in love.

I left the sanatorium and with such money as I had, which wasn't a lot, I went to the Embankments' Bar nearby. I reflected sadly on the words of Shakespeare, a very great Englishman, who said: "Play the man." He didn't say, "Be a man," he only said, "Play the man."

Oh, God. Oh, Sacred Heart. The Lord have mercy on her, I tried to "Play the man," for I could not be one now.

I sat in the snug of the bar, putting on a brave face, and there was a young fellow there passing the time of day with no harm to anyone. But I was not able for him, and I left to come out into the daylight with a heart as black as night.

I had decided to walk awhile, and I was a bit shaken when I saw Mrs. Jones from the Wren's Nest, out in the Strawberry Beds, coming my way with her scrawny face and her red anti-christ pig's eyes. At the best of times I would not go within an ass's roar of her. Like the hammers of hell, I was on the Blessington bus for Dublin, changing there onto the number 21 for Watling Street.

Maureen's grandmother was at the door of her little house as I walked up the steps.

"How is my granddaughter?"

The directness of her question was something I was not prepared for, and I knew Maureen was not going so well, but I replied in my lying fashion: "She's all right." And I looked at her face to see if she believed me and she nodded her head in grateful acknowledgment.

"Would you ever come in, Brendan," she said, "and have a cup of coffee? Paddy will be home soon and he's been asking for you."

Paddy was her son and the father of Maureen, but to tell the truth, apart from the fact that coffee is a drink I particularly detest and tea was rationed at the time, I was not in the humor to talk to anyone. Yet it was not in me to refuse. It is great to be on your own for a bit in the sun, for this is something you never are in any prison for all their solitary confinements, and I had had my share of those. The fughpigs watched you every moment and even at such times when the worst of us would give a dog privacy. I was not that much of a sinner to refuse the old one, though, and I followed her into the house.

Paddy O'Reilly was nicknamed the "Man of Blood" because he worked at the slaughterhouse and was usually covered with the blood of animals rather than the blood of human beings, although I have a rather soft spot for animals and do not like to see them killed.

I have never been able to talk about things that mean a deal to me, and I'm not implying by this that anything I may have to say would cause Christ to come down off His cross or anything to that effect, but I'm just not able for it and that's all there is to it. So I was glad when Mrs. O'Reilly asked me about my days in Borstal. I told her about the West Belfast IRA man who had asked to see me at Feltham, though I didn't tell her that I was arsing round the Stations of the Cross at the time.

Her sons and grandsons were all in the IRA along with my own family, so she was more than interested when I told her that this Belfast man knew I was trained in Killiney Castle with Seumas MacIlhenna and Tommy Gunn.

Tommy was smashing at a party or a *ceilidh* and I had shared both with him many a time. And we fell to remembering what great gas Tommy was.

Just then Paddy walked in, still wearing his blood-stained apron and as he shook my hand he said: "*Céad míle fáilte romhat abhaile.*"

I thanked him and said, "*Go raibh maith agat.*"

He had a strong but sad face and he was a good man.

"How's Maureen?" he asked, for he knew I would not be sitting there for the good of my health.

I had acquired a certain amount of British slang, some of it from Borstal and some from brothers and cousins of mine who had fought in the British Army and in the Royal Air Force—a most honorable organization, despite the fact that I am supposedly against it.

"Paddy," I whispered out of the old one's hearing, "I think Maureen has bought it."

Paddy answered very sadly, "We will go down to the corner and we will have a jar."

For in times of great trouble, I am sorry to say, an Irishman will have a drink for to drown his sorrows and Mrs. O'Reilly had overheard us.

"Brendan," she said, "you told me Maureen was well."

"Yes, sure, so she is. Of course she's well," I lied.

"I don't think so. You and Paddy O'Reilly are not going down to have a drink for nothing."

"Look," I said, "maybe she is not so well."

It was not for me to tell her that her granddaughter was dying, but she was.

And the poor, frail, lovely old woman, who had been through the times of the Troubles and whose grandson I'd seen on a murder charge—a very honorable one if I might say so—broke down and wept.

Paddy and I went out and left her to her grief, which I suppose was not very courageous of us.

"Brendan," he said, "do you believe this?"

"Yes," I answered, "I've seen people dying before, Paddy, and she is definitely on the way out."

So he wept and I wept and we drank.

I did not see Maureen again and that is all I want to say about it. But I wish to God she was with me today.

And if these are the confessions of an Irish rebel, they are indeed confessions.

# THREE

NOW THE YOUNG are not for grieving but for living, and there was a party to celebrate Kathleen Costello's return from her abortion in Bristol, which I had good reason to attend.

Brian, her brother, welcomed me literally with open arms, when I entered the living room where the guests were assembled. Even her mother, Nora, the screwy old bitch, came over with a glass of whiskey in her hand and said, "You're welcome, Brendan Behan."

Bloodywell, I knew why I was welcome. It was I squared the matter for Kathleen to go over to England and have her baby out.

The mother was supposed to be a very good Catholic, and I was a bit shocked to see the matter of fact way she accepted the situation and even put up the money for the trip and the readies to pay the quack. She never let on to know, of course, that there was anything amiss and pretended to believe that Kathleen was "going on a bit of a holiday to the other side."

I had been a comrade of Brian's in the Fianna Boys—the Irish Republican youth organization—since we were twelve years old and later in the IRA. Brian and I drank together and sometimes I drank with Kathleen—not that she drank much. I did not drink with her and Brian to-

gether except in their house, for he was a bit of a snob, and he did not want his only sister to get involved with a man destined to be a house painter, not if she could get some fellow with the readies.

I visited the house and went to all their parties. Kathleen liked me a lot. Aileen Curran, Brian's girl, said I did Kathleen a lot of good and was worth listening to except when I was drunk. And Brian liked me a lot because we were old comrades and so long as I did not attempt to involve myself with his sister. I liked them all, but I am a proud man, and the last I resented.

Now Nora disapproved of me, but when this matter of Kathleen's came up, Brian came looking for me to do something about it, and I did. Nora, through some way of her own known only to religious people, pretended to think that Kathleen was only going on a holiday, though none of that household had ever used England for holidays other than as a stepping stone to Paris, Rome or Barcelona. She financed the trip to Bristol, and even said to Kathleen, "Now, enjoy yourself, my dear."

And thus on the evening of Kathleen's return from England I was welcomed with open arms by her brother, who threw them around me, and by Nora, who gave me a qualified approval and a glass of whiskey.

In a corner and blind drunk as he had been for sixty years was Uncle Danny. He was the second most blasphemous man I'd ever met, except during his hangover in the morning.

Before he'd get a few glasses of whiskey into him, he'd moan and groan about his past and sinful life and quite sincerely pour himself a couple to give him the strength to get down to Mass. But by the time he had recovered sufficiently to get as far as the church door, he was strong in his unbelief again and very coarse apart from being blasphemous.

When I walked in, he said to me, "How is the hammer hanging?" And in the same breath he added, "Kathleen

is on the telephone talking to her intended. She looks well after her trip to the other side."

"Why wouldn't she look well?" said I, "and she a fine girl not twenty years of age? Aren't you looking well, and you four times that age?"

"I am, by Jesus," said Uncle Danny, "and six more years with it."

I knew he was eighty-five years old or more. He left the County Kildare at the time of the Land War, in Parnell's day. Danny shot a landlord who was evicting a widow and seven small children and had to leave the country like many a decent man before and since. He went to Dublin on the run there, till the money would arrive from Mexico to take him to his people there.

In the meantime there was this fine summer's day, and he went taking the fresh air for himself up in the Phoenix Park and stood for a while watching a cricket match. One of the gentlemen players hit the ball, and it traveled about two hundred yards and looked like traveling another two hundred. Danny walked casually along the side of the field almost as soon as the ball left the bat, reached up and caught it.

The gentry were in amazement and came over to ask him whether he would care to join in a game, but one of their number stepped up beside him, slipped him a gold sovereign and said in a low tone, "Get out of here, you bloody ruffian, while you're safe—the Vice-Regal Lodge is only a few yards from here."

"How do you know me?" asked Uncle Danny.

"Bloodywell I know you," says the gentleman. "Isn't it many's the time I saw you playing on the estate team. Only Danny Costello could field a ball like that."

Danny nodded to him, and went off out of the park as quick as he could with his sovereign.

I never heard him tell the story himself, though I heard him tell plenty of lies, but I knew that story was true because I heard it from other people.

When the Irish Free State was established in 1922,

Danny came home from Mexico. He applied for a pension for his part in the Land War and discovered that the official he gave an account of his deeds to was a nephew of the landlord he shot.

He lived for some time with his sister back in the County Meath, but he had to leave her place and come to Nora's place in Dublin on account of a terrible thing he did on the poor woman and she lying ill in bed. The sister used to get people to read to her books of devotion, mostly, and prayers of a consolatory nature to prepare her for the next world and ease her passage from this.

Danny went to the library and out of a pile of old books picked an antique volume with a leather cover. He told the sister it was *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis. He told her that Thomas à Kempis would have been canonized were it not for the fact that when they opened his coffin to see whether his remains were incorrupt, it was discovered that he had been buried alive, by the fact that he had gnawed away the top of his right shoulder, presumably in a frenzy, when he woke up and found himself to have been buried.

Danny told the terrified sister that the same thing happened to Juarez, the great Jesuit theologian. Then he read her a piece from his venerable leather-covered book:

> "It is well remembered here that about seven years ago one Frolick, a tall boy with lank hair, remarkable for stealing eggs and fucking them, was taken from the school in this parish . . ."

"Be Christ, and that's a remarkable thing," he says to the poor old one in the bed, "eggs, eggs—I've heard of many things in my day between here and Casa Catalina's. But eggs, that's a new one on me, I wonder how he managed it."

I was thinking that myself, when he asked me, "I hear you do a bit of writing?"

"A bit," said I.

"I seen a thing in one of them magazines they prints on straw or something in this miserable country about you being in prison in England for the cause. Now in this paper you were writing it says—"

"Listen, Danny, never mind my writing. How about your reading? What was the book you read to your sister with the dirt in it?"

"There was no dirt whatsoever in it, though you are all so pig-ignorant. It was the *Rambler* by Doctor Samuel Johnson, 'A Londoner's Visit to the Country,' if you want to know."

So it was, too, printed in that queer early English where the "s's" look like "f's," when I looked it up a few nights after in the National Library.

"Have another drink, Brendan Behan," said Nora. She always called me by my two names so as to be polite, but at the same time not making too free with me.

"I will, ma'am, thank you," said I. "I'd sooner the tap water than the soda water, if it's all equal to you."

"For me, Nora . . . um, ah, whiskey solo," said Danny, holding out his tumbler.

"You've have you 'nough for the moment," said Nora.

"Ah, Nora, you poor old Tee-Ah-Och Dan-Ne." (That's how it sounded.)

She handed me a drink.

"May the giving hand never falter," said I.

"You're welcome this night, Brendan Behan."

Take what you like out of that. Any other night I suppose the water out of the tap would be good enough for me. But like that again. that was not true, either. Fair play is bonny play and one thing about Nora or anyone belonging to her—they were never mean with drink.

Danny put forward his glass again, and she refilled it and her own with resignation.

"*Salud* and *slainte*," said Nora.

"*Slainte 'gus saol agaibh*," said I.

"*Salud, slainte, muchas pesetas*," said Danny, adding something about my castañetas.

"That'll do you now," said Nora. "Mind yourself. An old man like you should be ashamed of yourself. On your knees you should be, thinking of the next world."

"I thought that was supposed to be a great place," said Danny.

"It depends which part of it you go to," said Nora.

"What was that he said in Spanish about *castañetas?*" I asked her.

"Don't have me to tell you," said she. "It was shocking anyway."

"Well," said Danny, "what would shock that fellow would turn thousands gray. I only said—"

"Never you mind what you only said!" interrupted Nora. "Tomorrow morning, when you wake up crawsick, you'll be down on your knees praying for the wrath of God to be averted from a sinful old man. I know," she added, "because I've heard you in your room."

"Seeing as you listen to my prayers, it's a wonder you wouldn't be listening outside the retrate as well, when I'd be relieving myself of a morning."

Danny's humor had changed. He was really annoyed.

"Look," said I, "here's the girl herself." Kathleen was coming down the stairs. "Fresh and well, she's looking after her trip."

"So well she might," muttered Danny.

Nora left us to bring Kathleen over to someone to introduce them.

"Danny," said I, "Kathleen is very fond of you."

"Nobody's fond of you when you are old," said he. "The only reason the other bitch has me here is because she can call me Uncle, and it makes her think she's still young."

When her introductions to the new guest were complete, Kathleen came over to us, her black hair gleaming and brushed back the way she always wore it; her oval

face and brown eyes shining, innocent and understanding. The Madonna.

I was not thinking of her recent adventure, except that I was thinking if she couldn't resist a fellow, it was because she was too kind. "Feel better now, dear?" is a cant phrase, but in Kathleen's case it was an exact description of her maternal attitude. Not exactly, because she had her own enjoyment, too, and I know she had that as part of the headstroking and consoling. She was as natural and as pure as spring water, and I'd have done a lot for her and did. Wasn't I after organizing what even to me, a bad Catholic, was a most grievous sin?

"Well, a mhic," said she, looking at me. "How's Brendan?"

"Couldn't be better," said I. "If I was any better, I couldn't stick it. You're looking smashing, Kathleen, after your trip."

She gave me a class of a look more humorous than a wink and said, "Why wouldn't I?"

"You took the words out of me mouth," said Danny, who still had the spite over Nora's remarks to him.

"You could offer Kathleen a more civil welcome than that," said I.

"Oh," said Kathleen, "my Uncle Danny welcomed me already. He was out at the airport with Brian and Mammy, fighting." She turned to Danny, who grunted. "I'll get a drink for the three of us. Malt, Brendan? And you, Uncle? We have to ask the guests before the family. Malt? Right. And I'll have a gin and tonic, crystal clear as water, so as the people won't know what I'm drinking."

We watched her go to the sideboard. She poured a good measure of gin for herself. "For a girl of nineteen," said I, "she's not a bad hand at filling them."

"She's not, then, God bless her," said Uncle Danny.

"She never was, though," said I. "She takes it like she takes everything, as something that is there to be enjoyed. I've seen her drink as much as any of us, cook us a breakfast of rashers and eggs and then ask us all to go swim-

ming and we lying half-dead, trying to swallow a curer."

"It's the likes of you has her the way she is," said Danny. "Her and Brian," he added begrudgingly.

"Oh, I shouldn't have said that," said I, "about her drinking as much as any of us. I forgot that you're her granduncle."

I forgot, said I, in my own mind, that you are a dying old man and that I'm only pleasing you by drawing attention to your relationship to this lovely girl—lovely in the way that bright eyes and softness and breasts and humor and good opening legs made her. You, said I in my mind to Danny, are as much a relation of hers as the man in the moon, whoever in Jesus' name he is. Fughed up and dried up long since, you are.

She came back anyway with the drinks, and Danny forgot his bad humor, talking and drinking again. And I forgot mine. Couldn't I afford to? Poor old wretch! We all live to be as old as we can.

Lifting my tumbler, I said to Kathleen, as not too long before the detectives said to me, "*Céad míle fáilte*—a hundred thousand welcomes home to you."

"*Go raibh maith agat, a Bhreandain,*" said she. "Oh, there's Aileen." She took a running dive from Danny and me and went over to Aileen Farrell who was coming in the hall.

There was a confusion of female embracing and clinching and "Oh, Kathleen, you look marvelous," and more clinching and kissing, and "Oh, Aileen, it's lovely to see you," and "Oh, Kathleen, the trip did you good," and "Let me touch you."

"My Kathleen and how you've grown," I muttered, watching this touching scene.

"What's that you said?" asked Danny.

"How about a rosiner?" said I.

"Musha, then it wouldn't kill us," said Danny.

I brought over a whiskey bottle and filled our two tumblers.

"Hombre," said Danny.

"The skin off your knockers," said I.

Kathleen and Aileen broke from their clinch.

"Well, Brendan," said Aileen, with heaving bosom, "and how are you?"

"Only look at me," said I.

"Good evening, Mr. Costello," said she, paying her respects to Danny.

"Brian is doing barman," said Kathleen. "He'll be over in a minute."

"It's not him I came to see at all," said Aileen, with tempered judgment, "but yourself, Kathleen."

"Oh, is that the way with you?" said I. "Are you long going together?"

"I can see Brian any time," said Aileen.

Brian joined us then, and from that out, the five of us were together. Nora was well on, and after a while she got out the fiddle, and a fellow from their part of the country came out with an accordion and we danced and had a great *ceilidhe*.

Most of the guests were students at the National University and from the rich plains of the Midlands, with every look of solid comfort about them. They had two ways of looking at me. They liked me because I had served a sentence of three years for possessing explosives, but they didn't like the fact that I was a Dublin jackeen. They applauded vociferously when I sang nationalist songs about the 1916 Rising, but when I sang songs about the 1913 General Strike they were only polite.

Danny had it both ways and every way. He sang songs about the Land War, and with these students the memory of shooting English landlords was a worthy thing to be well remembered. But to go on strike against an Irish capitalist was not the same thing. I did not blame them for that. Many of them were the sons of gombeen men —credit shopkeepers, and moneylenders getting the profits of a whole district, each containing maybe a thousand families—but some of their ancestors, at any rate, had suffered a lot under the landlords.

Danny sang:

*"Oh, and sure if he spent it on mountainy dew,*
*I'd sooner he drank nor gave it to you.*
*You're a rent agent and should be hung from a yew*
*Tree says the wife of the Bould Tenant Farmer."*

And he sang the lament for Lord Waterford, a big landowner:

*"Oh, Lord Waterford is dead, says the Shan Van Vocht,*
*Oh, Lord Waterford is dead, says the Shan Van Vocht,*
*Lord Waterford is dead and the devil make his bed,*
*With an oven for his head, says the Shan Van Vocht."*

"Go on Danny, you boy, you!" they shouted.

*"The first that he did see, says the Shan Van Vocht,*
*Was his bailiff Black Magee, says the Shan Van Vocht.*
*He was standing at the shelf, washing up the devil's delf,*
*Says he, Milord is that yourself? says the Shan Van Vocht,*
*Milord is that yourself? says the Shan Van Vocht."*

"Me life on you, Danny!" they shouted. "Your blood is worth bottling!" Well, just at the moment it might, for his old face was pink as a baby's from passion and drink.

*"Glory-O! Glory-O! to her brave sons who*
*died,*
*In the cause of long downtrodden man*
*Glory-O! to Mount Leinster's own darling*
*and pride,*
*Dauntless Kelly, the boy from Killann."*

So we all got well-oiled, and Brian began remembering when we were kids in the Fianna, and he starts crying about all the poor kids, some of them only a couple of years older than ourselves, that were killed at University City, Albacete, Brunette, Guadalajara, and he is there crying like the rain over them.

After a good lot of friendliness and plenty of drinking most of the guests departed, and I found myself, as often I found myself before, in an armchair with Kathleen on my lap and her arms tangled around me. And in an adjoining armchair like the other half of a family group were Brian and Aileen in a similar position. Aileen was lighter than Kathleen. This I did not know from experience because Aileen was strict and impatient. Though frail and fair, she could repulse a pass from another fellow as effectively as she could a warning or advice about her affair with Brian.

She laughed at me as if I were twelve years old, except when I was talking about books or plays, for she took me very seriously as a writer. But as a man not at all. I was not satisfied with this because, like everyone in this world, I wanted respect for other things besides those qualities I was sure of. I suppose, on balance, I preferred Kathleen because I was not afraid of her.

But this I must say: no two people, even if one was as light as Aileen, ever slept in each other's arms. There's no sleeping about it except in an armchair or the back of a car and then only for the woman, for the man is a mattress for her. Lying here this night, I was as cramped as the crucified and then only able to move my arm and yawn restrictedly.

I heard a steady snoring from the other side of the room and some anguished muttering. Nora was doing the snoring, and Uncle Danny the anguishing: "Oh Lord Jesus, into Thy Hands I commend my spirit. Lord Jesus take me to Yourself."

"Amen to that, you noisy old fugher, as quick as He likes, but do you want to wake up the old bitch on us?"

Nora was stirring, like a dog digesting a dinner. Kathleen woke and whispered, "It's very late, pet, you'll stay the night?"

I nodded. My oath!

"Mammy says you can stay with Brian. Aileen is staying with me in my room." She moved off and went to wake the others. The others shook themselves up and we crept along to our rooms. "Good night, Brendan. Good night, Brian. Aileen and I are going to my room now." Aileen, more practical, said nothing but went into the room and put on the light.

In our room I looked around and sat on the bed beside the wall next to the girls' room.

"No," said Brian, "the other bed is yours." I went to the other bed and sat down.

"We'd better get into bed quick," said Brian. "That light is annoying me."

"I was waiting on the girls to use the jacks first," said I.

"Never mind that. They can go upstairs if they want, though they're probably waiting on us to use it. We'll go down, now." We went down and came back. I threw off my clothes and got into bed.

"Why the hell don't you hang your clothes up?" said Brian. "There are clothes hooks there in the corner."

"I did hang them up," said I, "on the floor—where they can't fall off."

"Why the hell can't you act like anybody else? You've got brains to burn, God knows, but shaving about once a fortnight, and acting like those bloody Baggot Street Bohemians—"

"Drum is our team," said I, "not Bohemians." (Drum-

contra and Bohemians were also the names of soccer teams.) "Bohs are amateurs, gentlemen players from the University, who are not long off the bog and doing their medical course with the money their daddies robbed off the starving peasantry."

"Oh, for Jesus' sake," said Brian, who was doing just that. "Doing the downtrodden proletariat again? Are my pajamas under your pillow?"

They were. "I didn't think you'd need them," said I.

He looked at me. "What do you mean by that?"

"It's a hot night," I said. "*Oiche mhaith dhuit.*"

Brian put out the light. "*Oiche mhaith dhuit.*"

I lay in the dark, looking up at the top of the window, and heard Brian breathe deeply to himself. God give you patience.

"Hey, Brendan," he said in a whisper, "do you think my Ma is gone to bed yet?"

"Whether she's in bed or on the sofa, she's put out the light," said I.

"Good. Would you mind going out for a bit?"

"Not at all. I'll put on my pants and socks and scarper."

"And what?"

"Scarper—my old reform school slang. Some says it's short for the rhyming-slang for Scapa Flow meaning go. Other say it's Italian for go."

"Never mind that now, just do it."

"I'm dressed ready and all."

I got out of bed and went into the hall. I stood there for a minute and then decided to pass the time going to the jacks. Besides, it was useful and necessary. Our organs can stand many things, but they are not cinema organs, which is not much of a joke but the best I could do at that hour for my cerebralities were taxed to the full with blood rushing from my stomach.

When I came out, I stood outside Kathleen's door. Then Aileen at last sneaked out. She was wearing a sort of tennis nightie, which consisted of, to the best of my knowledge and belief, a sleeveless frock of white cotton,

with rows of shamrocks all over it, and a collar with double the ration of shamrocks to the square inch and some crosses.

"The changing of the guard," said I.

"Hurry up and get in out of the cold," said she, not haughtily but reasonable, like one talking to an unreasonable though not unlikable person.

"I will so," said I. And went into Kathleen's room.

For the sake of good manners and curiosity, I went over first to the other bed beside our wall. It had not been slept in. I made my way over to Kathleen's bed and slipped in beside.

A tragedy of this life, I found out, is that you never realize how young you are till you are not so young. And then (I suppose) you are old.

We were barely lying alongthighs, starboard to port so to speak, when Nora struggled up and came gasping and snorting and panting along the corridor and shouted, "Brendan Behan, where are you?"

"I'm here—in bed—in Brian's room."

"Aileen?" bellowed the old bellowdame.

"Yes, Nora. I'm here with Kathleen," she shouted from beside her naked (I presume) fiancé.

The old one shambled away to her drunken sleep. "That's right. I'll allow no hedging or ditching in this house to bring the curse of God on us. It's not lucky—but you are good children. Boy with boys and girls with girls, what's natural and decent. That's the motto and sleeping arrangements of this house and of every decent Catholic home." She went off muttering to herself. "Nice Irish dances, no lying on top of and eating one another. As poor Father Ignatius Mary used to say, 'Fun, yes, but fun without vulgarity.' "

"That's it," I murmured.

"What's that, pet?" asked Kathleen.

"I'll tell you in a second," said I, adding, of course, a term of endearment.

The rest of the night I describe with these dots_____

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and, of course, some sleep.

In the morning Kathleen got up to cook the breakfast. Aileen came in and said, "Get up and go into your own room. I want to get into bed before Nora comes down."

I stretched my arms from the bed. "Come in and welcome."

"Come on, Funny Wonder," said Aileen impatiently. "It's cold out here."

I got up and went into Brian's room and into my own bed. He turned and groaned, "Dear God, I could do with a drink."

"That's a funny thing. I bet you didn't think about it at all till Aileen got up. After that, the horn is part of the hangover—like the itch."

"A lot of good Kathleen going away and the first thing she does is to sleep the night with you."

"What did you want me to do? Stand out in the corridor all night?"

"There were two beds there. You could have slept in Aileen's."

"And how do you know I didn't?"

"Bloodywell I know you didn't. You'd get up on a cat."

"Such is not my reputation around Baggot Street. There intelligentsia-esses think I am slow, if not positively King Lear."

"Well," he admitted, "looking at those ones with their Egyptian jewelry and woollen stockings, I wouldn't

blame you. But it could be very awkward about Kathleen and you."

"What about yourself and Aileen kipped in there for the night?"

"That's a different thing. We're engaged to be married, and a month or two wouldn't make any difference one way or another."

"Well, I wouldn't object to marrying Kathleen."

"No, but my mother would, and to be straight with you, so would I."

"Much about you," said I, "or your old one either."

"Well, what the hell could you do for her? I know and she knows and my mother knows that you've great talent as a writer, but you can't eat that. It might be years before you make a living at it, if ever you did. And in the meantime you won't work at your trade of house painting. But to hell with that. I like you and always have since we were kids in the Fianna together, and I like you now, even when you get fighting drunk or use bad language before women. But at the back of it, we're bourgeois people. And you—well, according to yourself, you're a jackeen from the North City slums. It's only your own description I'm using."

"You're not bourgeois," said I, "you're worse. Yours are bloody bogmen or bogmen and bogwomen with the cowshit barely off your boots, talking to the likes of me, whose people, seed, breed and generation are in this town since before yours came out of your mud cabins. You consumptive poxy parcel of fughpigs." I was dressed by this time, and out I went, slamming the door behind me.

"Hey, Brendan!" Brian shouted after me. "Wait a minute."

But I went downstairs to the kitchen to say goodbye to Kathleen. She was in the kitchen, talking over the stove with Aileen, who was laying the table.

"Good morning all," said I.

"You too," said Aileen.

"Ah, there you are, Brendan," said Kathleen in her easy, gentle way. "You're just in time for your breakfast."

"I don't want any, thanks."

"You don't want any? Sure, it's ready, and the tea is wet and all."

"I'm in a hurry out," said I in a sulky tone so as they would know there was something up.

"It's not out to work you're going?" said Aileen.

"You mind your own fughin' business," said I. "That's what you'll do."

"Don't talk to me like that," said this stern, slim fair-haired girl, "or I'll throw a plate at you."

"What's wrong with you, pet?" asked Kathleen to coax me. "Sure no one's been saying anything to you?"

I went fast out of the kitchen, but slowly up the stairs. I heard Aileen say, unconcernedly, "It suits him to go off like that." But Kathleen replied in a grieved and troubled tone something that I could not hear. But it was the tone that I cared about, and I walked with a surer step.

Nora met me at the top of the stairs, and I must say that for an elderly woman that was after a bellyful of booze the previous night, she looked well.

"Did you sit and have your breakfast, Brendan Behan?" she asked.

"No thanks, ma'am. I'm in a bit of a hurry." So I was, for the smell of food was making me sick, and I felt as if I would not be able to eat anything till I'd got a few drinks into me. That was really why I did not stay for breakfast, though I was hoping to get a bit of consideration for my wounded pride at the same time.

"Well, anyway, my husband sent you a message," she said.

"A message from Garcia?"

"His name is not Garcia. Though he had a first cousin in Cordoba—not Cordoba in Spain, but Cordoba in Mexico—that was called Garcia, Garcia Fernando de Soto Gilhooley—a lovely step-dancer he was too. Though I

didn't know you ever heard of him, you must have heard Brian talking about him."

"That was it," said I.

"Well, anyway, my husband sent you this message." She handed me an envelope.

"Thank you, ma'am. I'll see if there's an answer to it."

I went into the living room and opened it. Inside was a blue ten-pound note. I put it in my pocket. There was no other message. I got a piece of notepaper, put that in the envelope and went back to Nora.

"Here," said I, giving her back the envelope. "Tell your husband thanks very much, but I'm not in his employment. He can keep his money."

"But—but—listen," said Nora, "he only wants to—"

"Thanks," said I, my inexorable hand upraised. "A good morning. I'm in a hurry."

So I was and for three reasons. I was afraid she would look into the envelope and find that I'd taken the ten-pound note; I was afraid if I delayed any longer, I'd get sick in front of her; and I was in a hurry to get down to the Markets for a drink.

I was well into my second pint when the phone rang and Stinking Fish called me. He was an old gurrier that got his name from the time it was only legal for people doing business in the markets to drink there in the early morning. Stinking Fish used to have a basket of old fish that had been discarded as unfit for human consumption, and he'd sell it to the people. When a policeman came round and asked them what they were doing in the market, they'd hold up their piece of stinking fish and say, "I'm a buyer."

"I'll see if Mr. Brendan Behan is here," said Stinking Fish, looking over to me, and he shouted alongside the receiver, "Is Mr. Behan there?" I nodded and Stinking said, "I think Mr. Behan is here. Yes, he is and will take a message. Here he is now." He handed me the phone. "Here you are, Mr. Behan, sir."

It was Brian. "Listen, what the hell do you mean by telling my mother that you wouldn't take money from my father?"

"Why should I take money from any of you pack of fughing cowboys?"

"But you did take it after insulting the woman."

"You're a fughing liar. I opened the envelope and handed it back to her after I saw what was in it."

"After you took the ten pounds out of it."

"I did not—I handed the envelope back to her, as I got it."

"With the ten pounds gone and a piece of notepaper you put in its place."

"That's what she told you. You're a liar, and she's a liar and a thief.

"And you're a rotten fughing bastard, and I was worse even to have anything to do with you. Fugh you!"

"You, too, and your friends in America and your blind aunt in Spiddal!"

He banged down the receiver in a fury, and I went back to the bar.

"The same again, Michael," said I, "and a drink for Stinking Fish."

"Thanks," said Stinking.

I threw down the tenner.

"A blue one, bejasus!" said Michael. "Now aren't you the great sport, though, Brendan Behan!"

# FOUR

Like Sean O'Casey's, my family's land was all in window boxes, and the only time I ever dug a field was with my father, the time of the strike, when the Dublin Corporation gave the men plots of one-eighth of an acre out on Dean Swift's in Glasnevin.

And it was to Glasnevin Cemetery that I went this Easter Sunday, 1942, but not to dig a field. I had gone there with the rest of the IRA or what was left of it, to take part in the Easter Rising Commemoration parade, which is held at the graveside of the men who died for the freedom of Ireland in 1916.

There were a couple of thousand at the commemoration, not all of them active members of the IRA. Some of them, indeed, were British soldiers on leave, but in mufti.

I reflected sadly on my two IRA comrades now lying in the clay who had been sentenced to death in England by so-called British justice. They were two innocent but very brave men. One of them was arrested in London within half an hour of the explosion which took place in Coventry. There had been protest meetings and demonstrations all over Ireland and America. They would not soon be forgotten.

Still and all, I was here with thousands of others, thinking of them. I fell in with Cafferty, a young bricklayer about seventeen.

"Brendan," he said, "I think the police are following us."

I looked round and saw the squad cars and inside them sets of fugh-faced bastards intent on nothing less than grievous bodily harm.

I don't think they were very much interested in me, but they were interested in Andrew, Lasarian and Joseph, three IRA officers who were just in front of us. I was never an officer of anything. But it was good to feel the thousands of free people about me, a freedom to which I was not yet entirely accustomed.

Get stuffed, you old bastards, or we'll have a few words on the way back.

Cafferty was kicking the sods of green-topped turf apprehensively, so I put the word about that if the cops tried to molest the three fellows, we would beat them up. They couldn't possibly shoot the lot of us. We'd rivet them with digs in the old mince pies.

I have a sense of humor that would nearly cause me to laugh at a funeral, providing it wasn't my own. But when I am dealing with ignorant swine of police, my humor deserts me, and all I want to do is to needle them as best I can according to their particular brand of insolence. I started singing Gaelic songs, very rebel ones at that, and soon a lot of the other blokes joined in too.

The fracas started on our way back from the cemetery. It was short and sweet like an ass's gallop but in those few moments I lived a full life's span, and in the years that followed I was never to forget them.

Ah, Mother of Jesus, it was a fughing disgrace. The hungry-faced police jumped out of their cars and went to arrest Andrew, Lasarian and Joseph. They gathered around them and looked as if they were going to go mad any minute. My stomach was trying to get rid of my dinner, and a cold sweat broke out on me. All at once I threw off my overcoat and went to attack them with my fists.

"Come on, we'll fix this bloody shower," I said to Cafferty.

Everyone was shouting and saying things and one big ugly-faced policeman was going mad with the temper, shouting himself to tell them to shut up, when all of a sudden somebody screamed, "That man has a gun," and I looked round and saw the steel glint of a revolver in one IRA officer's hand, and he was altogether hysterical.

"I'll use it, I'll use it!" he screamed.

Christ, said I in my own mind, why wasn't I in Borstal? At least I would be there in peace and on my own, instead of here with my guts twisted up inside me.

As I snatched the revolver out of the officer's hand, the police opened fire. I didn't, and not until they opened fire did I fire back at them, and, still firing, Cafferty and I made a desperate run for it.

We jumped over the wall of the nearest house, a little suburban petit bourgeois home, and crouched in the shrubbery at the back of the wall trying to get back into breathing practice. A cold, clammy sweat now broke out on my forehead in delayed action for the fright I hadn't had time to have during the shooting. My hands were trembling, and I would have liked to see if my voice was still with me but I knew the effort of holding my breath to stop my stammer would have made me nearly pass out in a weakness.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon and winter had made way for spring.

I nudged Cafferty, for the door of the house opened and I could see a middle-aged woman bent over a bowl of milk, which she carried in her hand. She spotted the pair of us immediately, and let out a cry that would freeze the heart of the hangman, and she shook the bowl of milk so much with fright that she nearly churned it. You could almost see the butter. But it wasn't the poor soul's fault. Not every day in the week would you see

two armed youths of nineteen and seventeen years of age, appearing over your garden wall. In fear and trembling she turned back toward the door shouting as she did so, "Jack, Jack! There's two fellows coming in here with guns!" Because by this time Cafferty and I, half bent up so as not to be too conspicuous from the road, had made for her door.

We heard footsteps coming from the back parlor and a deep burly voice, "Bejasus, and they're not coming in here!"

And I thought I'd see a guy of about six foot with shoulders on him like King Kong's. I'd seen the film when I was a young boy of about twelve or thirteen, and he was the most terrifying gorilla you could possibly imagine. Dracula and Frankenstein's monster were a wedding night in comparison.

Instead of which a little man smaller than myself came out. He looked defiantly at us, but I could tell he was as nervous as we were, with our eyes going over every inch of him and every feature of his face and figure.

"You can't come in here," he said.

"I'm sorry," says I, "but we've got to," and then I smiled and slipped in "sir," because he was a decent enough old skin and only trying to protect his own. Though his mouth was firm and angry, I knew, relieved, that his heart was softening.

"But there's little children in the house."

I felt like crying for the first time in years. I would rather cut off an arm than harm a hair of a child's head, but I could not blame him for thinking differently. All at once I felt my groin stiffen in fear and the cold clammy sweat dance a jig on my forehead. "Time is, time was, time is no more," I said in my own mind. We can't stand here arguing the moments away.

"We don't want to frighten any little children, but there are people out there," I said, nodding my head in the direction on the road, "who mean us no good." For we could hear the shouting of the police and the noises

of the approaching Army lorries. I clenched my teeth and Cafferty and I pushed the poor old bastard back into his own home at gunpoint. His only crime was being there when he could have been over at Michael's, giving out the pay about the big race in England over a glass or two of porter. His old one gathered the children around her, muttering words to the Virgin Mary as she did so. On the wall was a picture of Our Lord carrying a lamp, and underneath, carved in wood, the words "Stand Firm."

We did and the divil take the begrudgers.

"If you are going to stop here," said the brave man, "hand me over the barker."

"In my ballocks," says I. "Nobody gets my revolver, that's for sure. Use your bloody sense. We've got to defend ourselves. We're not going to interfere with you or yours. If there's a fight here, you can go upstairs."

His wattles flamed in anger, and for a moment I thought he was going to cut up rough, and I felt more in the humor for the religion of my fathers than I had done since I was excommunicated. Oh, Sacred Heart, no more violence.

But he only said, "Listen till I tell you. I won't be ordered around in my own house by a pup like you," which I think was very courageous and furthermore very sensible of him.

I sat beside Cafferty on the stairs, which led straight out of the front room of the place and faced the door so that we were nice and handy for anything that might be coming our way from that direction. I wiped the sweat off, too, and wished that my sick bilious headache would give my other thoughts a break. Better than a dozen of stout, that break would be.

We heard footsteps coming to the door. My Jesus, my heart fell into my boots and in my defenseless misery I wished I could wake up and find out that I had been dreaming all this and say that's how it would be if you were wanted by the police. But it seemed very likely

that that's how things were going to be as the knock came on the door. Up like a shot I was, with my skit steady in my hand.

"Holy Mary, don't fire," the poor man shouted out. "That's my daughter returning from Mass," and sure enough, the door opened and a very attractive girl of about my age, or maybe a few months younger, came in. She banged out the door behind her and put the missal on the table, pushing aside the dirty dishes from the half-eaten dinner as she did so. I had the skit in my right-hand trouser pocket as best I could, but without a coat the butt was easily seen. I needn't have minded for you could tell she was a sensitive soul and would have seen the hunted look in our eyes anyway.

She turned as she spoke. "Are you the boys that were in the fighting up in Glasnevin Cemetery?"

"Yes, I am—we are," I replied, and Cafferty elbowed me not to be saying too much, but not too strongly for on account of my having been pinched in England doing my bit for the cause, he had great *meas* for me.

She asked me what I knew about it, and I told her what had taken place, at the same time giving good account of ourselves. I was always hot in the heels for admiration.

"I can tell you," she said, "that there's a cordon of military and police all round the place." And fearless rebel that I am, I desperately wanted to shit, and so I did, in double-quick time out the back, and wiped myself and back again as trim as you like and she still standing there as if I had never left. Fear can do this to a man and no mistake.

She smiled for pity's and civility's sake and touched my arm.

"I think I can get you out." Words sweet to my ear, and I'll never forget them.

"Can you?" I said.

Hard on her heels we followed, and I had it in mind to have the old barker a little more to hand than in the

trouser pocket, so I fingered it and felt the warmth come back into my crotch after the cold fear and decided I would push my luck and leave it where it was, the revolver I mean.

There was no one around, but I could hear voices shouting in the distance, and as the day had not yet begun to feel its age, there was still plenty of time for the rozzers to do a good job on us. The girl brought us across by a side entrance to Glasnevin Cemetery formerly unknown to me, although I'd known the cemetery all my life and all my deaths, because practically all my ancestors are buried there. And though they say the air is so healthy there that you're in danger of meeting yourself coming back, I wasn't in mind to be sampling it, this day or the next.

We followed her across the cemetery to the side exit, and there we were free. God is all right and His mother as well, I thought to myself.

"Go *raibh míle maith agat*," I said and with sincerity as I shook her hand.

"That's all right, *tá fáilte romhat*," said she looking at both of us, "*slán libh*."

"*Slán a't*."

And I nearly fell out of my standing, for this girl then handed us two packets of Sweet Afton cigarettes, a box of matches and several bars of chocolate, which shows a kindness and an understanding that you'd not be meeting every day. I felt the lump come up in my throat, swallowed back hard, for I am not a hard man and these things touch me. And I had not seen her take any of these things from the house.

We made for Moibhi Road, out toward the north side of Dublin, and I could hear the trams far away in the distance and imagined the old ones up there, after Mass and a sup or two of the plain porter and glad of a few minutes' chat as they rode the distance home, a bit jarred and singing.

Turning the corners heavily now, the trams gathered

speed for the hills, and the church bells banged more dully as the day began to get more gloomy with the fading light of the afternoon. In misery I discovered that such money as I had, which wasn't a terrible lot but enough for a few drinks, I'd left in my overcoat, which I had thrown off at the start of the shooting, and Cafferty didn't have any money whatsoever.

We sat down behind a hedge in a cornfield and lit up our cigarettes, not wishing to search our hearts to find our voices. I drew the smoke deeply into my lungs, felt it circle around and up and out and stared straight at it as it billowed in front of me. We had to have money for no matter how we rationed the bars of chocolate, they couldn't last for more than a day or two, which made me do the meanest thing I have ever done in my life, or at any rate, one of the meanest. We were forced to hold up a pitch-and-toss school, what the Australians call a two-up. They were innocent people enjoying a game of a Sunday afternoon and were utterly bewildered by the sudden appearance of two light youths demanding the loot at the point of a gun. One old fellow, braver than the rest, went for to hit me in the face, "Fughing swine, bloody bastard! I'll teach you young puppies how to behave. By Christ, I haven't done with you!" I shoved him away as we grabbed the money and disappeared into the near darkness again, thank Jesus and still breathing.

The bells out in the city rang a quarter past seven, and I knew the pubs would be closing soon for the day, such were the licensing laws in Ireland at the time. However we felt our standard of living had gone up with a bang, and we had another smoke and finished off the chocolate when I remembered some relations of mine who were living nearby and who might be persuaded to help us, to the tune of some clothing at any rate.

I hadn't noticed the sharp frost in the air until then, and besides an overcoat was essential for another reason. A man who is carrying a revolver in his trouser pocket doesn't exactly encourage friendship, and the thing was

so noticeable that you'd hardly be needing a fanfare of the President's trumpets to announce it.

We decided to push our luck and up at the door and knocking on it, but in terror now, for I was not one of the wrap-the-green-flag-round-me juniors that came into the IRA from the Gaelic League, well ready to die for the honor of Ireland. I was ready to die for an overcoat and probably would from the perishing cold if the DMP's didn't make a meatball of me first.

Jesus, wasn't that little enough to ask? What harm would I be doing them? At least, they could only refuse and wouldn't make a dinner of us.

The door opened. Then the smile faded and the gentleness receded and anger came from the pit of my stomach and I twisted the palm round in my hand. You poxy-faced bastard of a whore's melt, I said in my own mind, and prepared to give him a belt. But when all is said and done, it would have been to no effect. They were not kindly disposed toward us and I put it to myself that one day I would give them the rub over it.

I caught Cafferty looking at me in a kind of sad but friendly way that cheered me up a bit and I looked back at him as if to say, "It'll be okay, kid." I felt ten feet tall and responsible but wishing all the same I was in bed at home in Russell Street with my mother telling me, half-laughing in spite of herself, that I was a good-for-nothing Irish mick and her sending me out for the message with the hard day's earnings and the jug to put a drop in, and she waiting on the stuff to no avail.

A man needed all his strength in the times that were in it, and I turned away touching Cafferty on the arm as I did so.

"Come on," I said. "I know where to go."

We went to a house in a terrible slum place, God forgive me for saying so because I don't want to sound ungrateful, but it consisted of converted coachmen's houses, which didn't look as right as the old London mews before they became fashionable. In one of them lived a

kindly woman who had known my family many a long year and had been a companion of my mother's at school. She would give us a chance I knew.

"Connie," I said, "we're on the run."

"Yes," she answered. "And you don't want to be standing out there. You're identified, the both of you. I heard the news on the wireless. You had better come in before the likes of them see you."

The blessings of Jasus on you and on everyone like you and it's my praise that I'm giving you, but aloud I said:

"See, can you do anything for us?"

"Certainly, Brendan," she said. "I'll do the same for you as I did for all the boys in 'twenty, 'twenty-one, 'twenty-two and 'twenty-three. I'll fix you up."

And she took us in and gave us this plate of bacon and cabbage, which was her own dinner for sure, as she would hardly have been likely to have food enough for herself, let alone to spare, and a glass of porter, and I felt the warmth embrace me like a blanket after the cold and Jesus, Mary and Joseph wasn't she apologizing for the sparsity of it all?

"Connie," I said, "didn't you take us in and feed us and clothe us? And for the rest, I'll take the will for the deed, and dark and black as things are for us, they are no longer as dark and black as they were before."

She fitted us up with some rugs and cushions on the floor, which was the best the poor soul could do, and lying down I started to read the *Sunday Independent*, but it was cold with my arms outside the rug, so I put the paper down and my arms inside, and I must have fallen asleep for the next thing I knew was Cafferty shaking me and telling me that we should be away before daylight.

I left the house as a blind man leaves his dog, and all thoughts went past me and jumped out of the queue ahead of me, I was that unable for them.

We turned the corner and into the dawn.

*This jewel that houses our hopes and our fears*
*Was knocked up from the swamp in the last hundred years;*
*But the last shall be first and the first shall be last:*
*May the Lord in His mercy be kind to Belfast.*

# FIVE

THIS POEM is called "Ballad to a Traditional Refrain" and was written by the Belfast poet Maurice Craig, who has now left his native city. I include it here for the simple reason that Cafferty and I had to leave our native city and make for the border before the sun had the heart to get up that Monday morning.

Now everyone knows about the border between the North and South of Ireland—the Six Counties as they are called—but it is not very real in everyday life.

Like millions of others, I believe in the freedom of Ireland and to me the border is completely nonsensical. In one place it actually partitions a farmhouse and you could be having a shit in the South and your breakfast in the North, or the other way around, by simply walking a few steps. By the same token you'd be mad not to cross the street and have a gill of the plain porter on the southern side for the sufficient reason that the drink here is cheaper, not being subject to British tax laws. But I wasn't much troubled by these things this day. My political thinking was directed only to our own safety.

In the half-light of the dawn I recognized Eddie, Maureen's brother and an old and trusted friend of mine in the IRA, running up the street toward us. He pulled us into a doorway away from the light of the street lamp and told me he had had instructions to take the gun off

me. He had been looking for us all the night and I could tell he was weary of the load of it. I would have liked to have helped him for he was a good skin and I knew his mother and father, brothers and sisters as well as I knew my own, and we fought the same battles together, on the playground and elsewhere, with great function and capernosity.

"I'll give you the barker, Eddie," I said, "if you will hand me over yours in return," for he was standing that close to me that you would have to be an eejit to miss it.

But he refused and it wasn't until many years later that he told me that the heroes of officialdom had given him a completely useless weapon to exchange with mine, which I must say was very sporting of them. In my ballocks and to hell with you. Up the Republic.

We shook hands in sadness.

"*Slàn leat*, Eddie," I said.

"*Slán a't* and mind yourself," he said as he put his arm round me in a tender, smiling, approving sort of way.

The bells in the city rang a quarter to five and the air of the early spring morning was frosty and blunt as metal.

Nothing of any consequence happened on our way to the border apart from a few little shootings here and there, which I would prefer to forget for I am not a killer myself and if I did kill, I only killed in war and I am very sorry for it. I never killed anyone for land or for anything that could be described as plentifying myself. If I killed, it was as a soldier of the Irish Republican Army, of which I was proud to be a member.

In Belfast we went to the house of a young girl on whom I was trying to make an impression while Cafferty was giving out the pay on the enormous wages being earned by the workers in the factories and the shipyards in the north. He mentioned one friend in particular, and though I wasn't trying to give this girl the idea that I was a millionaire or anything like that, I didn't expect Caf-

ferty to spell it out that before the war this man had been like ourselves penniless. Now there's a friend for you.

The next day I was at a wedding of a woman of the *Cumann nam Bhan*, the League of Women, which is the female opposite number of the Irish Republican Army. She was marrying an IRA man so it was all in the family.

The center of these bridal festivities was a small red-bricked house in the Falls Road area of Belfast, which is the main Catholic area, and it stood in a line of other red-bricked houses that might be found anywhere in either the north of England or the north of Ireland, in Liverpool or in Belfast.

The house was surrounded by gunmen, some of them carrying Thompson submachine guns, while others had long Webleys and Colt automatics, in case the Royal Ulster Constabulary might make a surprise raid, which knowing the cowardice of the bastards of the police, North or South, they wouldn't have the guts to do.

But, honest to Jasus, you'd have to laugh, for inside the house everyone was dancing and singing as if every day of the week you'd be marrying your mot under armed guard.

It was a great night and put me in mind of my father and mother and he getting up to take the floor in "Haste to the Wedding," and the two of them singing:

*"Says herself to meself, 'We're as good as the rest,'*
*Says herself to meself, 'Sure, we're better nor Gold,'*
*Says herself to meself, 'You're as wild as the rest of them,'*
*'Kathy,' says I, 'sure we're time enough old . . .'"*

There was plenty of drink, plenty of Guinness and whiskey and by the time we had a few jars in us, the

Royal Ulster Constabulary could have raided the joint and taken us along for good measure. I'm happy to say, however, that the guards were more conscientious, even though we were handing them the odd pint from out the window.

I noticed one fellow had a long spring, which is used by plumbers and fitters to bend a pipe, but he had it up his sleeve, and if you got a belt of it, it certainly wouldn't improve your health.

I did not let on that I had seen it, but I was shaken all the same and was glad when Ambush, an old friend of mine, handed me the gargle and asked for a stave or two on the mouth-organ, at which I am fairly adept. I played the tune of the "Internationale" and Ambush joined in with the words and then sang a merry song about a hunger strike:

*"Let me carry your cross for Ireland, Lord,*
*The time of our trial draws near,*
*And the pangs and the pains of the sacrifices*
*Must be borne by loved ones dear.*
*But Lord take me from the offering throng,*
*There are others less prepared,*
*Though anxious and all as we are to die*
*That Ireland may be spared."*

Among the guests at the wedding was the bridegroom's rejected suitoress, who was also an Irish Republican Armyess, if I may be so disrespectful of the movement, and not wishing to be left out of the proceedings, she sang:

*"I will wear a smile tonight, my dear,*
*Though the false one may be there,*
*The gems they hang around you*
*Still linger in my hair."*

Someone at the back of the room signaled to me to stop her, but she wasn't done yet, and without further

warning, a most bloodcurdling moan went through the place as she threw back her shawl for further utterance:

*"And even he who's left me,*
*Will think my heart is light*
*Though I'll cry my bit tomorrow*
*I'll wear a smile tonight."*

Don't ask me the meaning, for this is Belfast language, but in matters of sentiment there can be nothing but nonsensicality.

We were all a good way gone by now in the process of liquidation, and an old one stood up and sang a song about her late husband, who was a gunner and had met some quicker gunner in action at the Dardanelles. The quicker gunner was on the cousin's side, which is an example to people not to be getting mixed up in family quarrels.

Then Ambush gave another bar, not on the European disturbances but on rebel ones, "Here Comes our Fenian Blade." He had a good voice, which is a thing I admire in a citizen, being no mean performer on the gargle trap myself.

"Give us a stave, Brendan," he said when he finished, so I sang, to the assembled Orangemen, "God Save the King" backwards, which is something I had picked up from a china in Borstal. My family would be shocked out of their boots and the present company did not at all relish England or anything to do with it, but the day was so far gone that discretion was no longer the better part of valor.

But to show there was no favoritism, cute Christian that I am, I sang, with an ever-increasing voice that could be heard all over Belfast:

*"Come out and rattle your bin,*
*Tiddy-fol-loll, tiddy-fol-lay."*

In the pogroms the people used to warn one another of the approach of the murder gang from street to street by rattling the tops of the dustbins and this was the song they sang. It is a good song, as most Northern songs are.

"Encore," they shouted in jovial humor, "give us the one you sang at the wake!"

I had to give three encores, and if I say so myself, I was in fine voice.

Cafferty and I remained in Belfast until the heat blew off a little, for we heard on the wireless that a most intensive search was being carried on for the pair of us, and I got a kind of pleasure thinking of the uniformed men going mad from dreaming of the stripe they'd fall in for if they got us.

We saw no signs of police activity till we reached a village on the Dublin County border. Some of them were sitting in their cars while other uniformed police were standing around. We went into a tiny public house that I knew and where they knew me, and we were shown immediately into a little room at the back. There was a slide in the wall communicating with the bar and having plenty of the readies, I shouted through it.

"A pint of stout myself. A pint of stout?" Cafferty nodded. So we had the stout and a crubeen each and a plate of bread and butter, and the steaming hot pig's foot warmed us up for the road and what we might have to face out there.

We shoved the empty plates back through the hatch, had a piss for good measure and went back out into the road.

All was quiet outside now except for the birds who were getting up over our heads and the spring making way for the summer, and I took in the air and the sun and the smell of the earth.

When we reached the outskirts of the city, Cafferty and I separated as we had heard that there was an order out for me to be shot on sight, as I, having fired the gun,

was considered the more dangerous. In my ballocks, I said in my own mind, and not in the sight of God was there to see us all.

But it wouldn't be doing Cafferty any good, for at this stage of the game he could only be termed an accessory, or whatever the bejasus they call it.

The order for me to be shot was issued by Chief Superintendent Gantley, a whore's melt of a man, and another ex-Free State Army guttersnipe, neither of whom were ever in the Irish Republican Army, at least as active members. Afterward Gantley, Seán of that ilk, was shot by one of his own men when he was leading a bravado raid on two criminals—if they can be so called, for it is not very often I use the word—who were hiding in the Hammond Lane Foundry in Dublin.

With a mutter of encouragement, for I was sorry to see him go, Cafferty went off down the street until the sun and the light enveloped him and he was gone.

When my mother was still at school, she had a friend, Chrissie Richardson, who lived in an orphanage in Dublin. Later, when my mother was the caretaker of an organization called the Irish White Cross in Harcourt Street, Chrissie brought her boy friend Alf, a Geordie and a very delightful one in my opinion, up to my mother's house, and he was on the run, not for the fact that he was an Irish Republican soldier but because he was a deserter from the British Army. My mother put him up and she put Chrissie up until they got married and then we all lived in the same street. To tell the truth, when I first heard Alf speak I thought he was a foreigner, though in some parts of England he'd probably be taken for an Irishman on account of his accent.

I went now to Alf and Chrissie's house, and I hid there in the home of an ex-soldier of the British Army with the very proud distinction of having deserted, and they gave me a bed and enough of food and treated me like one of their own.

I joined in with the Dublin Brigade of the Irish Republican Army and we held up a number of pawn shops and at one of them forcibly bagged for the cause some £2,000 to £3,000. Cafferty also raided pawn shops and was arrested and released. And these are the circumstances of his release.

He and two other Republican men had gone into one of the biggest pawn offices in Dublin, and while the two of them had held up the clerks at the counter, Cafferty stuck his revolver against the back of the neck of a carpenter who had the misfortune to be mending the floor that very morning.

"Keep on hitting that floor, Mac, and nothing bad will happen to you, but if you attempt to raise your head, I'll blow it off you."

"All right," says the carpenter. "I was through the Troubled Times." And he kept on hitting the floor, while Cafferty and the other two scarpered with the money.

Several days later the three of them were arrested by the Broy Harriers, by Gantley and his merry men, and wherever Gantley is planted, I don't think he looks all that merry now, having been shot as I said by one of his own squad. They were great men at shooting because they were usually half drunk when they came out of the Castle, which is where the Specials have their headquarters, on the job.

The carpenter was called upon to identify them.

"Certainly," says he, "I'll identify them. Just show me their feet."

So the policeman thought this was the most extraordinary request, but at the same time he was glad to get a witness, because the clerks in the pawn office just announced they didn't want to have anything to do with it.

They marched the carpenter along where all these guys' feet were, and when he came to Cafferty's, he said:

"That's the man!"

"How the hell?" said Cafferty. "Are you mad or what?

To make an identification you must place your hand on the person's shoulder and look into his face."

"You're the man that put the gun at the back of my neck at the pawn office on such a date, 1942, this year of Our Lord."

"Look, you haven't even seen my face until this moment."

"No," says the carpenter, "but I saw your shoes, and if you were looking at somebody's shoes for five minutes with a .45 at the back of your neck, you would know every wrinkle in those shoes as well as you know the wrinkles in your own face when you are shaving it."

Cafferty was charged and the carpenter was called upon to give evidence, which he agreed to do. And the police said he was a great man and a good citizen and they gave him plenty of whiskey, plenty of good entertainment and all the rest of it.

But before he came to give evidence, he received at his house a shoe box with a dirty old shoe in it, and attached to the shoe was a Mass card and in the box was a bullet. On the Mass card was written the carpenter's name and the day of the forthcoming trial. "In Memoriam of his dear soul. Will those who think of him today, a little prayer to Jesus say. Hang his picture on the wall. Gone but not forgotten."

The carpenter took this as a strong hint and desisted from his efforts to become a state witness.

"How the hell could I identify a man from his shoes?" he said to the police.

And Cafferty was released.

# SIX

Outside the sun was just beginning on a feeble attempt to come out on this June day, 1942, and while others were getting ready to go about their business, I sat down this morning after a kipper, some mushrooms, tea with bread and marmalade and butter and reflected on my condition. Even if I had no money, there were people who would give me the odd pint of porter or a glass of malt betimes in return for the old chat or a piece of my impertinence.

I was at Jack Corr's residence in Number 15 Blessington Street, Dublin, near to where my great-grandmother and my grandfather lived. I had decided that a bit of light and air would be more to my taste, and light and air I got for the asking without moving a muscle.

The door flew open as if the devil himself was behind it, and a lot of mean-faced bastards grabbed me as I made for the window. I was treated to a piece of verbal abuse by Gantley and his minions, but I was not physically assaulted as I had been in Liverpool when I was last arrested. One of the detective officers slipped me a packet of cigarettes and a box of matches, some would say for to soften me up to give information, but I am always prepared to look upon these things as manifestations of human charity. They searched me, putting their hands along the seams of my trousers where they found the gun.

"You wouldn't have come in here so shagging easy," I said, "if I had had the time to use it. You'll never drive the Irish out of Ireland, and that's for fughing sure."

Gantley looked at me and sighed, as if he had heard nothing, and with a younger, dark-haired one, put the handcuffs on me. I was taken out to a waiting car where a crowd had now gathered, and one of them made a half-hearted attempt to speak to me.

"Come on," said the dark-haired one, "move off out of that. There's nothing to see here. Come on, get a move on with you."

We drove to station headquarters where the sergeant wrote down my name and my particulars, and I was put in one of the cells looking out toward the flats, to await trial in the morning. I sat on the side of the bed and lit up a choker, staring into it as if mesmerized, watching the ash falling to the floor, and I remained sitting long after. Jesus Christ, I was locked up only three hours and this time it would be forever.

I lay back on the mattress trying to put my mind on other things and settled myself more comfortably by putting the end of my blanket on the wooden pillow to soften it.

Others had done it in this position, looking at the ceiling, and the exercise would make me pleasantly tired.

Afterward I lay half eating the sleep until I was deep in it.

When I awoke there was silence but for the chimes of Christ Church, lonely in the night, from the top of the hill. I wanted to use the lavatory and by lighting a match, I found it in the corner from the door. I stood over it in cold and loneliness, and my despair marked time while I used it.

Bloody shit-houses. I'd give them pushing and shoving and roaring and bawling if I ever met them outside. But I'd never be outside again, and I gave a long, long sniff and was turning it into a sneeze when the clanking of keys in the lock of the door interrupted me.

The warder was carrying a tray with aluminum cans on it. It was my dinner avic and you wouldn't want to be disturbing a sinner in his sleep and like Lanna Machree's dog, what harm is there going a bit of the road with everyone? He put the tray down as he spoke, giving me the wink as he did so.

In one of the cans there was a thick soup, while the other held potatoes and before the warder had banged out the door, I had made good account of my appetite, and felt the better for it.

I lay back on my bed and wondered if they would take me to court in the morning, and I knew the desperate fear of the condemned man waking up the morning of his execution. It wasn't even possible that morning should come, when at least I would not be in solitude. Fighting is better than loneliness even if they were distributing nothing better than thumps and verbal abuse.

At last I heard footsteps coming and the key turning in the lock.

"Right, follow me. Down for a wash."

A big lump of a fellow and friendly with it all and I went down to the washhouse with him, feeling more alive. Puffed, powdered and shaved, I was taken in a squad car to Collins' Barracks, where I saw Andrew, Lasarian and Joseph who were being charged with me for their part in the shooting at Glasnevin. I had not seen them since, and now for a moment we all stood together united in gloom. We were charged with attempted murder and being in possession of arms and remanded to Bridewell Prison to await trial.

The previous day there had been a long debate in the Cabinet, I understand, as to whether my case should be heard at the Special Military Court or the Special Criminal Court. Although the same shower of bastards sat at both Courts, the Special Military one, under the "Special Powers Act," could only find you guilty and sentence you to death, or find you not guilty and dis-

charge you. They had no alternative. At the Special Criminal Court, where there was a sketchy idea of normal law procedure, they could sentence you to death or to imprisonment, but they could only sentence you to capital punishment in the case of a capital charge, meaning if you had killed somebody.

For two weeks Andrew, Lasarian, Joseph and myself were all in "C" wing awaiting trial. We were in separate cells, two, three and one, and although we had to do our own chores and clean up our cells, we did not have to slop out our chamber pots as there was a proper jacks in the corner. The chain however was outside the door as these shower of bastards were taking nothing to chance. The cleaners would come round each morning and pull them. On the second morning I sat on my bed listening to the old ones flushing the lavatories until this one arrives at my door.

"Will I pull your chain, sir?" she asked.

"Yes please, ma'am."

"What are you in for, son?"

"Shooting at the fughing police."

"Ah, Jesus," she wailed, "what will they do to you for that?"

"They'll fughing well hang me, that's what they'll do."

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph," and now she was nearly crying with it. "God help your poor mother."

"Screw my mother," I said. "It's not her they'll be hanging, it's me."

She went off down the landing, after first giving me a look to kill, muttering in disgust.

Being on remand we could smoke, and I was grateful not to have to ration myself with the reading. But the waiting battered my bared nerves and all I could do with the sickness in my stomach was to lean over the side of the bed and wish that the waiting would end. Except, God look down on you, it could be the end.

Until this day when the warder unlocks us earlier than

usual and tells us to stand to our doors and wait for our escort as we are appearing before the Special Criminal Court that day.

We were taken down to the prison yard where a police tender was waiting. Each one of us was handcuffed to a screw, who was armed, and we all piled in the tender, team-handed. Three other harriers, carrying Thompson submachine guns, climbed in alongside with us to ensure we did not run away with the escort. The doors banged out and the engine started and we sat there looking at the floor, wondering at the times we were in.

When we arrived at Collins' Barracks we were brought into a waiting room and our handcuffs were removed. Our names were shouted and we went into the Tribunal to face Colonel John Joyce and several other uniformed men. As we were soldiers of the Irish Republican Army we refused to recognize the Court, and the Court entered pleas of "not guilty," after it had been established that we were of right mind.

More right-minded than you'll ever be, you brown-arsed ballockses, I said in my own mind.

Andrew, Lasarian and Joseph were charged with possessing firearms and having incriminating documents and being members of an illegal organization, while I was charged with the attempted murder of Patrick Kirwan and Martin Hanrahan, or Martin Kirwan and Patrick Hanrahan, who gives a fugh which, and for being also in illegal possession of firearms.

Colonel John Joyce and the officers sat in front of us on a slightly raised counter of sorts, their caps and their swords in front of them, and our military escort told us quite civilly to go into the dock and stop there.

The police told their story and, with one exception, told it without any venom, and I reflected on the sadness of Irishmen fighting Irishmen or indeed, I'm ashamed even now to say, of men fighting men or men fighting women or women fighting women anywhere, because at heart I'm a pacifist.

The colonel asked us had we anything to say and I decided to use the same statement that had put the judge at Liverpool in a vicious and unjudicial temper before sentencing me to three years' Borstal Detention.

After I had said, "Gentlemen," and all to that effect, I continued:

"But there is but the one settlement to the Irish Question, and until the thirty-two-county Republic of Ireland is once more functioning, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace. God save Ireland." And I shouted, "Up the Republic" across the room and into their faces as they settled themselves to sentence us.

Andrew and Lasarian got seven years and Joseph, on account of his youth I suppose, eighteen months.

My guts twisted up inside of me and I could feel the stomach muscles snarl and stiffen. Fourteen years penal servitude. You fugh-faced bastard, tight-lipped screwshit. That the devil may choke you and the Republic, but leave me out of the shouting for the cause all on my own. A kick up the ballocks is what I'd like to give you.

It was over and there's an end on it. I got the heaviest sentence despite the fact that I was the least guilty of the four in the eyes of the Irish Republic. Later I had the satisfaction of reading in our Republican underground journal, which is printed in Belfast, that "Volunteer Behan displayed great courage in the face of the officers of the Special Criminal Court."

I read this with rather an ironical smile.

Following us at the trial were some light youths who had been arrested for a bank holdup in a border town, and I knew from experience that this is a job that gives one no glory if you are caught, because despite the fact that you are robbing in the name of the Republic and for the cause, you are specifically forbidden by general orders of the IRA to refuse to recognize the court. You cannot claim political protection and you face your sentence as an ordinary criminal. I have nothing against criminals except every criminal I know is a Tory and a

bore, and in Ireland votes—when he is out of the nick and has a vote—for the people who were shoving some of my friends against the wall and sending me and others to fourteen years, seven years and eighteen months penal servitude.

I admired these fellows so much on this day, for they were coming up smiling all over their plaques, and with their courage I went down smiling too and in good humor, for as somebody said: "Any man who shoots at a policeman at fourteen yards and misses him deserves a year for every yard he missed him by."

My mother was waiting outside the room and the mothers of some of the other boys, and my mother was in tears and I gave her my hand and struggled for the breath to speak and in doing so knew it would not come. I ran down the steps and into the police van for Mountjoy Jail. There was already quite a few blokes in there and I climbed inside next to Andrew. There was a boy sitting on the other side and although there was plenty of room, he only moved an inch or two.

Lasarian was sitting near the door and I handed him a lighted cigarette which he put in his mouth, hung on to it and drew smoke, gazing on the end of it. The guard slammed the door dividing the driver's compartment from us and we moved off.

There were slits at the top for ventilation and I stood up to look out and saw the back of the Central Criminal Court and thought wistfully about Robert Emmet, a doctor's son and a great leader of the fight for Irish Independence, who was tried there for his pains.

I gave the fellows a running commentary as the van drove along.

"We're going past the Plaza now, the picture house."

"I go to it every Sunday. Never miss it," said the boy, and smacked his lips as if in anticipation of the next Sunday's outing.

"Well, you're going to miss it next Sunday," said Lasarian sharply.

The boy worked his mouth a little but said nothing. I tried to console him, telling him he was bound to have his sentence reduced for good behavior and that it was his first offense and all to that effect, but after a while I could see it was no good, so I gave up.

Up Blessington Street we went, round Berkeley Road, down the North Circular, down and around and up the avenue to the main gate. There were shouts from the guard to the warders at the gate, the gate opened and the van moved forward.

"We're going in," I said, as I turned my head from the ventilation slit and sat down by Andrew.

We all drew our breath in unison as the van drove slowly in and stopped opposite the steps leading to the prison. There was a man on the inner gate and he banged the side of the van with his fist.

"Put out them cigarettes and hurry up, get out!"

We filed out and stood in a line in the yard and looked around, and the screws did too at other prisoners nodding to each other while they weeded round a grass verge. They didn't nod to us but only to one another.

A screw shouted impatiently, "Look sharp, there, you bastards. I want this verge tidied up before you go to bed."

Some of the prisoners wore heavy frieze suits, dark gray with a broad stripe and caps of the same color with a large button on top. Others wore no jackets, but cotton shirts and a heavy piece of cloth round the neck to represent a tie.

A bullet-headed coal-block of a man with a face for hardness but bad for color came down the steps, followed by a warder with a silver band round his cap. The guard stiffened to attention.

"All receptions correct, sir."

Bullet-head nodded and indicated for us to follow him and we were taken to a place that resembled the accident ward of a hospital. Here eighty other IRA men

were waiting to give their names to a warder writing in a large book. In the corner were bath cubicles.

"Breandán ó Beacháin," I said to the warder, who up to this moment was carrying on a love affair with the book and his mouth eating out the ink as he wrote, he was that close to it.

He snuffled something to himself and raised his head, "Ah, you're one of the fellows who was in jail over in England."

"Yes," I answered, and what's it to you, you louse-bound, deskbound bastard leaving the Republic to look after itself, but quietly to myself.

"You're a tough guy." And his beady little eyes became brave with governors, chiefs, principals, clerks and Jesus knows who around to protect him.

"I'll show you whether I fughing am or not," I said, and at that time, if I say so myself, I was pretty tough.

Two warders grabbed me by the arm. "Come on, Brendan," the gray-haired one said, "there's no sense in villainy here. He didn't mean you any harm."

They took me over to the bath cubicles where I refused to be searched before taking off my clothes, and Andrew and Lasarian did the same. We were given nine inches of water apiece, "in case we bloody-well drink it," I shouted in at the fellow in the next cubicle.

I felt good after the bath and holding the towel away, I looked down at myself. Jesus, it must be a terrible thing to get old, I thought, with bent old legs and twisted bunions toes, and the crinkle in my belly would straighten out in this kip without the aid of porter, for it was the drink that did the most damage.

Another prisoner unlocked the cubicle and handed me my clothes, and I rapped into the young boy, Joseph, who was standing with some other prisoners and Andrew and Lasarian. We were marched in single file through the main corridor and into the prison.

"Stand here in the center," said the warder, when we got to what seemed to be the main street of the prison.

It was at the junction of the four wings: "A" leading straight west, "B" and "C" at angles in the middle and "D" the continuation of "A" going east. There were steel galleries all round, three of them in each wing, and steel stairs joining them. Beside "A" wing was the shaft to the kitchen, and beside them, in the center of the circle, was a stone pillar with a triangle hanging on it. We used to sing a song of it:

*A hungry feeling came o'er me stealing*
*And the mice were squealing in my prison*
*cell,*
*And that old triangle*
*Went jingle jangle,*
*Along the banks of the Royal Canal.*

*To begin the morning*
*The warder bawling*
*Get out of bed and clean up your cell,*
*And that old triangle*
*Went jingle jangle,*
*Along the banks of the Royal Canal.*

Toward the bottom of "D" wing there was a red metal door with a barred gate, painted aluminum, over it. It was the door of the hang-house.

Andrew, Lasarian, Joseph and I were assigned to "B" wing and one of the fellows that had held up the bank on a border town whose trial followed ours.

"Stand to a cell door, each one of you," rasped a warder, and to me, "come on you, get a move on yourself there."

I moved slowly around a bit and was glad that I was giving the needle to this fugh-faced, dried-up old bastard. His gills wattled in anger as he pushed me toward the cell door, handing me my kit—pillowcases containing sheets and a towel—as he did so.

He opened the door and by Jasus, my heart fell into

my boots. It was like the black hole of Calcutta, only the walls were whitewashed. Otherwise you wouldn't have seen them at all, as half the window was below the level of the ground. In the dim light I could see the usual inscriptions on the walls. There were hearts and flowers and names that I couldn't decipher too well.

The warder slammed the door behind me, rose the cover over in the little spy-hole in the door, knocked it down again and was off across the corridor, his footsteps fading as he did so. I walked the ten paces down from the door to what was an excuse for a window, and reflected in misery the amount of exercise I would be getting if I did this every day of the fourteen-year stretch.

In the morning I was opened up, having accomplished the usual prison formalities of doing my cell, eating my breakfast, using the chamber pot and slopping it out with the others.

Nobody spoke of it of course, but there was an air of tension about the place as we had heard that a prisoner in "D" wing, Bernard Kirwan by name, was due to be topped shortly, but as he is not here to defend himself, I'll say no more about him, except that he had a very gay personality.

Since it was summer, I had come in late from the exercising yard after a game of handball with a young fellow from Limerick called Hickey. He was a decent lad and known throughout the nick for this reason. Our shirts were washed each week by the ladies on the female side of the prison, and they would hang them out in the exercise yard. It would relieve the monotony of the times, us standing at the window keeping an eye out for them and they stretching and reaching off chairs to hang them on the line. But sometimes the shirts were so badly done that you wouldn't be knowing whether they had been washed at all. Hickey got fed up with this one time, and he wrote on the collar of his shirt, which was as limp as the wire from the morning's pull, "More starch

here," and he got it back with a note pinned to the tail of it, "Less shit here."

But on this day as Hickey and I came in together, Bernard Kirwan was with his visitors and two warders, and shoving aside the two warders who stood aghast at the idea of a condemned man having contact with anybody, he dashed out from the cell and embraced us both.

"Tomorrow," he said, "at ten past eight, I'll be praying for you in heaven."

The Lord have mercy on him. I hope his prayers were heard.

The next morning as he was taken out to be executed he put a cup of water on the back of his right hand and turned to the warder and said: "You see, that's the hand of a man that's going to be hanged in ten minutes," and his hand never shook.

Somebody said to me he was very brave.

"No," says I. "He was very mad." For he didn't know a lot about execution by hanging, which is a very painful method of dying according to reports I've heard from the various jails I was in.

Years later I based my play *The Quare Fellow* on the last few weeks of this man's life.

The only other execution in the "Joy" while I was there was of a boy from the County Kerry, who had fired a shot at the police, which was one of the charges that had got me my stretch. But the inscrutable ways of the Lord being what they are, he was thought to be more important than I was, and he was shot.

I would like to put it on record that he was executed not by the British and not by the Northern Ireland authorities but by Mister Eamon de Valera's Republican Government, which proves that statements like "your own looking after you" are complete nonsense.

The prison routine at Mountjoy was similar to the jail at Liverpool with the exception that most of my comrades here were engaged in various handicraft classes

such as embroidery and basket-work. They sat on their chairs in silent rows, embroidering mostly monuments to misery, "In Memory of Our Lord Jesus Christ," and "The Sacred Heart" and "To the Soldiers of the Republic Executed from 1939 to 1942." And one more ambitious hungry-faced little bastard gave a list of those who were hanged or shot or killed.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, it put years on me, and there wasn't man or boy among us who didn't make these Celtic crosses from matches in memory of some bloody thing or another. After a while some of the fellows became really handy at it, and they would stick together pieces of used matchsticks and make them into all sorts of things.

I was never able for it for my fingers were scarred like the hands of drug addicts with the needle marks from sewing mailbags up in Walton jail in England. But I used to collect their rejects and send them out to friends of mine who would say, "Brendan Behan made this up in Mountjoy Prison."

Now the days began to shorten and the autumn got weaker and weaker and then beaten into winter and there was an awful east wind that was up around the jail and we were on our way to Christmas. Instead of embroidery, now, the fellows were making Christmas cards, but I didn't have anything to do with it as I was too busy reading and smoking and having an occasional drink, by the courtesy of a warder who made a few pennies shopping in drink and cigarettes and shopping out letters, until he was caught and given his cards.

One of the fellows designed a Christmas card in the shape of a tombstone, in memory of a soldier of the Republic who had been executed during that year, and he intended to send it to this young man's parents. The front of the card gave an account of his life and his death and inside was written, "In loving memory of Jimmy McSherry, died for the Republic of Ireland, November, 1942. Will those who think of him today, A little prayer

to Jesus say. Wishing his father and mother a very happy Christmas and a bright and prosperous New Year, signed, Yours sincerely, Jimmy Stokes."

On the ninth of February I was twenty, and on St. Patrick's Day, Andrew, Lasarian, Joseph and I were in the exercise yard with shamrocks in our lapels, though I had never gone a bundle on St. Patrick's Day or on shamrock, but it reminded us of Easter and the Republican Feast and the march to Glasnevin Cemetery.

There was a certain amount of monotony in our spring and summer days, though you'd get that in any nick only more so. But time passed well and I was getting used to it, and you could always have a bit of sport during the day.

That night I had a bit of a read till they put the lights out, and then thinking that a year of the fourteen-year stretch had passed, went asleep.

*If you go to the Curragh camp,*
*Just ask for number nine,*
*You'll see swaddies standing there*
*And the best looking one is mine.*

# SEVEN

We were slopped out earlier than usual this morning and the warder told me to put a tie on when I had finished my breakfast.

"I will in my ballocks," I told him.

As I had my visit at the beginning of the month and hadn't put in for a special one, I didn't think it could be that, unless it was some good-for-nothing do-good man from the Society for the Rehabilitation of Recidivist Prisoners or the Department of Lick-Your-Arse Reformers. I had no intention of jazzing myself up for the likes of them. I'd had one of them to visit me previously and he spoke in terms of the royal "we," as if he was not above doing a job himself, casing a joint for some rocks. Stealing a penny from a blind man's plate would have been more in his line.

There was great excitement among the blokes because they'd seen an empty coach drawn up in the yard and no new receptions to account for it. They kept looking up at the screw in charge of the landing as if they were going to learn anything by getting a look at him.

At last a screw read from a list: "The following will be transferred to the military prison at Arbour Hill," and I looked at Andrew who looked at me and Lasarian looked at us both because there was little chance of us not being included in this lot.

I wasn't out of my mind about this transaction because I had heard that the cells there were only about sixteen feet by eight and that a prisoner in solitary confinement could only walk five paces each way. But I also knew that beyond the boundary wall of the exercise yard were the graves of the men who had been executed in Easter Week, 1916: Thomas J. Clarke, Pádraig H. Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and the rest. I knew their names and all belonging to them as well as I knew my own.

In the heels of the hunt our names were called, and ah, I said to myself, a change is as good as a rest, and we ran upstairs in great jubilation to collect our small kit.

We were handcuffed in pairs and the cuffs were attached to two long chains, one for each side of the coach. I got handcuffed to Hickey, and Andrew and Lasarian were on the chain beside. We stood in line for the start, shipshape and Bristol fashion, and as quick as an ass's gallop we were up and in the coach moving out of the exercise yard and speeding on the open road for the five-minutes run to Arbour Hill.

I'd not have believed a person if he'd told me that summer would ever end as I looked over the Dublin mountains, the moors and the marshes, and smelled again the sea, and I sang out for myself, "The sea, oh, the sea, *a ghradh gheal mo chroidhe*."

Everyone looked at me in surprise but in great humor and there were shouts for the old songs I knew. Some I had heard in my own home from my mother, although a few of her generation were made ashamed of the old tunes that kept up the hearts of the people for years. I was always curious to find out what they used to sing in the times before herself and made a point of listening to the old ones on pension day in the pub.

I sang "Get up, Says Skin-the-Goat," and "James Carey with His Son," and everyone joined in, screws and all, with the sad and lovely "Kevin Barry," known the two sides of the Atlantic.

Until the coach stops in the yard of the prison.

The handcuffs and chains were taken off and we were lined up in the yard. One screw went into the building to get receipts for our safe delivery, while the principal screw took us through another door to get our kit.

We began to take off our clothes and most of us by now didn't give a God damn, one way or another, about our nakedness, but a new fellow, Thomas Magaretty, was standing in the corner of the room with his right hand over his crotch and lower too. He reddened up and his face went over every inch of me as I sang, "I've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts," and I could have bitten the tongue back into my throat when he whispered under his breath that he'd only one ballock. How anyone would know the difference, I do not know, but apparently he seemed to think they did.

The same fellow used to receive letters from his wife addressed to "Thomas Magaretty, Political Prisoner," and bejasus, say it as one who shouldn't, he certainly looked like one. He had hair as white as snow and a skin that was tired from the stretching, and the effort he took to go last in the showers on account of his having only one ballock would go through you. He could take a joke if it was two feet from his nose.

One time, in the half-light of a November's evening, I attired myself in the showers with a towel round my middle and stretched out my arms like an apparition, and when Magaretty saw me, the poor little bugger fled screaming, "Oh, Jesus, the place is haunted!"

It's a queer world but the best we've got to be going on with.

After Christmas we were shifted again, this time about thirty miles, to the Curragh Internment Camp, and we were glad to be there, for we had all been through the mill together, though none of us spoke of it. I was surprised to find I knew a great many of the prisoners, including my good friend Cafferty.

But it wasn't only members of the IRA who were in-

terned in the camp, for there was a number of British, Canadian, American and German fliers there too, although they were in separate camps from us. Now I have never been one to give out the pay about the lack of bravery in others, being a natural coward myself, but in the case of the British, American and Canadian fliers, they were rather cowardly to give themselves up, because they could have got back from Free State territory if they had repaired their airplanes inside twenty-four hours and flown to Northern Ireland. For the matter of that, they could have left their wrecked aircraft and even walked across the border, or taken a bus. I heard there were plenty who did.

Some of these internees, no doubt sensible men, preferred to spend the rest of the war as heroes among the racing ladies of the Curragh rather than face further horrors, for they all got parole, as far as I could see, for about twenty-four hours a day. The Germans, on the other hand, had no alternative, but they too had their supporters among some of the Irish bourgeoisie and indeed among some of the British.

In the Curragh there were from thirty to forty of us sleeping in huts together, and although Andrew was in a different hut further up, Lasarian and Joseph, who was with us again now though he had not been in Arbour Hill, were in beds next door to mine, while Cafferty was under the window, near the door. Opposite me was a Tyrone man, six feet three inches in his stockinged feet, with a mass of blond curly hair.

He came across to me and Cafferty introduced himself.

"You should apply for admittance to the hospital," said the Tyrone man.

I will in my ballocks, I said in my own mind. "Why? There's nothing wrong with me."

Neither there was. I was as perfect a specimen of Irish youth as you would have found anywhere. I had nice

teeth, good hair, good complexion, no stomach and altogether was God's gift to the feminine race if I could have found any of them around.

But this Tyrone man had a point, for the hospital got the best of the meat that came into the prison, and the cooks got the best of the meat that came into the hospital; for as the saying has it, first up is the best dressed and he was pretty friendly with the cooks. There was another reason as well. Whatever may be said against the Free State Army, they do not starve you, and every tubercular patient in the hospital got two bottles of stout a day and twelve ounces of chicken.

Against their arrival in the hospital, some of the fellows stole new chamber pots from the stores, so when they were first admitted, and not able for the stout, they'd be pouring it into the chamber pots, each of which held approximately one gallon, and each day they would return the empty bottles as the screws insisted.

On my first evening in the Curragh, one or two of the blokes had arranged a party for me in the hospital as it was nearly my twenty-first birthday. They had saved up sufficient of stout and chicken for to enable us to carry on until at least three in the morning.

A happier hospital I've never seen in my life. The singing got well under way, and us throwing out from the roots our rich tenor voices, increasing in volume with the intake of stout. The sergeants of the "Linseed Lancers," as we called the Medical Corps, came in to sing an aria from *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and one from Gounod's *Faust*, and I contributed a couple of numbers myself. It is said that we were drinking a toast to ourselves, the felons of our land.

*Let tyrants mock and traitors sneer, little do*
*we care,*
*A felon's cap is the noblest crown an Irish head*
*can wear.*

*And every Gael in Inisfail who scorns the*
*serf's vile brand,*
*From Lee to Boyne, would gladly join, the*
*fellows of our land.*

I was in the process of celebrating this song with a toast when one of the guards passed by the window. Hearing the noise, he looked in and promptly fainted when he saw me raising a chamber pot to my lips and eagerly drinking from it.

As I lay warm and jarred in my bed that night, I looked across at Lasarian, his face lit in the glow of a dog-end.

"Count your bloody sheep," I said. "This is a good kip."

The Curragh camp was divided politically into three divisions: those who supported the official IRA, those who, like myself, supported the unofficial IRA, and those who didn't agree with either side and formed a group of their own.

I had sympathy with all of them and on all sides I had friends, but I was tempted to join the first division in which there was Cathal Goulding, a very dear friend of mine whom I had known since childhood. We had known each other almost from the time we were born. We had been in the Fianna Boy Scout Organization together and joined the IRA together, had been thrown out of it together and been taken back in it together.

He was doing a stretch in the Curragh for an armed raid. As a matter of a fact, I did join his division for a while, but whichever side you favored, you were forbidden to patronize the others. You could not even talk to them. Now I am the most inconsistent person in the world and I could never keep up things like this for long, not out of any sense of decency but because I would forget to keep it up.

After having warned me several times about talking to the other groups, the official IRA got fed up with Brendan Francis Behan, and I was thrown out. Cathal

gave me a packet of cigarettes as a leaving present. Jesus, you'd be thinking I was going to America, instead of across a concrete path.

I then joined those who supported the less official IRA, some of whom were also very dear friends of mine and still are and to whom I would look for succor, rather than to any other persons in Ireland.

Outside the camp it was popularly supposed that the three divisions were for those who supported the Allies, those who supported the Germans and those who supported the Left Wing. But such was not so. Cut it any way you like, we were a mixed bag, nationally, politically and socially, and you'd be needing a medal not to be affected by the many crosscurrents at work. In every prisoner-of-war camp there is a barbed-wire psychosis that makes outside judgments truly ridiculous, and there's an end on it.

But none of us were badly treated in my time there, although I did hear when the so-called purge was on in 1940 that some of the blokes got an extremely rough time indeed.

One of them was Rorry Brugha. His father, Cathal Brugha, was a former Minister for Defense in the Irish Republican Cabinet and a martyr of the Civil War. Incidentally, he was one of the last men to be killed in it.

But Brugha's son was ordered to run the gauntlet and get his meals like anyone else, and to do this he had to go between a file of Free State Army police shit, who beat him with batons on his way to and from the kitchen, which is one of the most disgusting stories I have ever heard, but I know it to be true, because friends of mine, whom I trust, told me so and it was common conversation in the camp at the time.

By the time the year 1943 was over we knew everyone and everyone knew us, and we were glad to be together even in a familiar routine. Then early in the New Year, the snow came, which is not a common occurrence in Ireland, and it was hard to believe that we were ever

warm. Still and all, we generally managed to live through the winter, and the devil himself couldn't kill us in summer.

It was Cathal Goulding made the bet. One hundred cigarettes that I wouldn't run round the camp starkballock in the snow.

"Sure thing, Cathal," said I. "Of course I will." And I'm up early the next morning in the dark and cold and the snow starting to come down again but melting over me, and round the camp like a shot with me, for I was slim and light on my feet as a feather.

I ran naked round the place, warm enough and in great delight, slashing and smacking the snow with my bare feet, then down in it, rolling over and over and biting it like candy-floss at the fair.

By the time I was back at the hut, the real genuine undiluted stuff was coming down in soft flakes, mild and gentle. My body was glowing from the snow and my hairs were curling from the damp of it and I felt the heat come back into my crotch as I rubbed myself dry and put on my clothes and thought of the hundred of snout I would be getting. They would be somebody's rations for a time to come.

Afterward, I was sitting in the lavatory, which we called "Bolands," in honor of the Minister for Justice of the day whose name it was, and I had the privilege of listening to two young fellows discussing the affair:

"For a boy so slim," one said, "Behan is a pretty tough guy."

The blessings of Jesus on you and all belonging to you.

I do not recommend that anyone should drink potheen by choice, for it stands to common sense that the fine old drop of moonshine made with all sorts of improvised utensils cannot improve the health. But for want of a better alternative, we did make it in the Curragh camp. It was a very united demonstration for it incorporated all three divisions. The official side gave us the piping for to

make a worm and from the less official side, less official even than ourselves, we obtained a supply of sugar, while we ourselves supplied the cereal and the skill of Gerrity and Gallagher and Jack Lynch to manufacture the finished product.

One man, Black Dan O'Toole, who was really a cook in the kitchen and gave us the best meat and, if I may say so, was as fine a soldier as ever the Republican Army produced, and these three, Gerrity, Gallagher, a Mayo man from the west of Ireland, and Jack Lynch from west Cork, supervised the preparation of the mixture in readiness for the Easter celebrations of 1945.

Potheen is made as a result of grain of some description being fermented and then boiled and then distilled and finally forced through a worm by steam pressure, where it comes out at the other end in tiny drops. Most of us agreed that under no circumstances were the first three drops to be drunk, but that they had to be given to the fairies.

"Oh, fugh the fairies," said Dan O'Toole. "I don't believe in that bloody nonsense."

"Oh, no," we insisted. "You have to throw them out," and throw them out we did.

Afterward a doctor told me that we weren't so foolish as we looked, because the first three drops of the distilled spirit contain a lot of fusel oil, which is likely to blind you if you drink it.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon before we finished distilling the potheen and, although spring hadn't the mind to know what it was at, it was quite warm in the sun. Then Jack Lynch roared out that the Easter concert went on in three hours' time and we'd better get the chamber pots and fill them up ready for the ding-dong later on.

The concert put years on me, not for that it was bad—I gave them a big hand when they finished—but I was suspended that much with the waiting for the fruits of

the afternoon labors that I didn't give a fugh one way or another whether it was *Carmen*, or "The Wearing of the Green," or, for the matter of that, "Ol' King Cole" they were playing. Some of the others, I noticed, went for it like fresh bread, however.

That night, and a better drunk I hope never to enjoy for the rest of my life, we were joined by a great many military police, one of whom was in an advanced state of intoxication due to his being rather more paternal with his captives than he should have been. He asked me to sing him some Gaelic songs and right rebel ones at that, and the more insulting they were the better this bloke liked them, and I being full of potheen and full of goodwill toward one and all was in good voice, though I say so myself.

The night ended with a bit of a song, "My Dark Rosaleen."

*"O! the Erne shall run red,*
*With redundance of blood,*
*The earth shall rock beneath our tread,*
*And flames wrap hill and wood,*
*And gun-peal, and slogan cry,*
*Wake many a glen serene,*
*Eer you shall fade, eer you shall die,*
*My dark Rosaleen, my own Rosaleen,*
*The Judgment Hour must first be nigh,*
*Eer you can fade, eer you can die,*
*My Dark Rosaleen!"*

Which is by James Joyce's favorite poet, James Clarence Mangan, who died of the cholera fever in the great famine of 1847.

This song was sung as never before or since by myself on Easter Sunday, 1945, very well full of home-distilled potheen fresh from the Curragh camp and from which the late Daniel O'Toole, Donal Dubh, or Black Dan as

we called him from the color of his hair and not from the color of his heart, was prevented from drinking the first three drops.

Shortly after this, Hitler's death was announced over the wireless, to the widespread cheers of the majority of both the internees and the prisoners. But I had two friends whose views on Hitler were so different and whose hatred of each other was so intense that they'd be nearly coming to blows every time they met.

Eamonn was a Dublin ex-civil servant and he seemed to think that Hitler wasn't as black as he was painted, while Gerry, who was a Cork man of five-foot-nothing, detested Hitler and all his works and pomps. He was the most aggressive man in Curragh and the toughest I've ever seen in my life. In the camp he'd be doing physical exercises and all to that effect each morning, while the rest of us were taking it easy and improving the shining hour by the bit of chat. But this geezer had fought in the International Brigade at Madrid and on the Ebro Front, as had some of the other fellows in the camp—quite a good number, as a matter of fact.

At teatime that day, Cafferty, Cathal, Eamonn and I were talking about Hitler.

"Gerry must be pleased with the news," said Eamonn, "but Hitler wasn't a bad old skin for all that."

"Well," I said, "Gerry was just telling me, now that it's all over, it might be that you should meet each other and shake hands on it and all."

For the stir-about-spoon and sheer villainy I'd be hard to equal, and I winked across the table at Cathal as I spoke.

"Is that right?" said Eamonn. "And I wouldn't think the less of him for that."

But at the same time he pretended not to be too much interested. The moment he had his scoff eaten, he went out. After tea the kitchen orderlies cleared us all out and Cathal, Cafferty and I rambled round talking and smok-

ing and stopping every now and then to get a fresh light, when whom should I see out of the corner of my right eye but Eamonn walking across to Gerry.

"I believe," he said, "that you are showing some sympathy for the Fuhrer at last, now that he is dead."

And Gerry took one look at him, his teeth clenched like something in a dog show.

"Fugh you and the Fuhrer, you fughing fascist bastard!" he shouted, jumping straight at him.

I caught the two of them by the scruffs of their necks and separated them, for I thought they would have killed each other. And I didn't want to have that responsibility hanging on me.

"Up! Out of it, you dirty pair of bloody savages!"

The military policeman came across the yard toward us. Sweetest voice in the land of Erin, me life on you, said I in my own mind, for I could see by the looks on their faces that this is where Brendan is for a bundle too.

"The bloody idea! If you want to fight, do it on my labor party and I'll soon show you that you're on the wrong ship!" And he turned to me. "What's it all about Behan?"

I said I knew nothing. I heard shouting, ran over and separated them. Begod, I had it, and the Father of Lies, God bless him and the Mother of Lies, too.

The corporal stood looking at me doubtfully, drew a deep breath, nodded and walked away. Honest to God, I was sorry and a bit ashamed of being sorry instead of laughing myself sick over a bit of a gag to relieve the monotony of the times we were in.

Eamonn and Gerry rambled off in the direction of their huts, and I thought we might all live to have worse ailments than shagging over Hitler and he lying dead with his mot.

That night, warm in my bed, I lay in the half light and rolled up a tiny dog-end. Every tinker had his way of dancing and every cripple his way of walking, and even

if all of us were the kids that our mothers had warned us about, we were not a bad crowd at that, and the part of North Dublin that I came from was as tough as any. I sat looking round me in the dark. Lasarian, Cafferty and Joseph were all asleep, and where the blue light in the hut lit their faces, innocent they looked.

I read a few extra pages of a book by Arthur Koestler, as much as I could before I too went asleep.

# EIGHT

As a rule I didn't take much interest in what fughing British convoy had gone where or how far the Allied armies were stretching themselves in occupied territory, but since Hitler snuffed, there was a great tension and impatience among some of the fellows and particularly among the internees, wondering when they were going to get out. It didn't bother me a load. There was little chance for me going out, whatever chance there was for the others.

This morning a lot of military police were talking in groups by the scoff house, and it didn't take long before word got around that all the internees were to be released and a great number of the prisoners too. Andrew, Lasarian and Joseph went out, and I thought Cafferty would die from excitement, his hand shaking while he shook mine to tell me he'd go and see my family before the day was "bet."

I watched them into the lorry and waved and turned away over to the exercise yard with Cathal. All the internees were in the yard being marshaled by the sergeant-major in pairs for the collecting base, an ass's bawl from where we stood, to wait for buses to take them home.

Only twenty-two of us, supposed to be the hard core of the Irish Republican Army, of which I was proud to

be included, were selected to remain behind in the camp. The sergeant-major ordered that there was to be no demonstration or cheering or anything, because I suppose he thought it would be unfair to us, and in a way he was right. But God never closes one door but He opens another, and if He takes away with His right hand, He gives back with His left and more besides, for we were in a camp normally for thousands which was now completely empty. We could have slept in a hut for ourselves if we liked and eaten the rations of six men, because, as I remarked previously, the Free State Army was never stingy with food.

Cathal and I did sod all for a week, except eat sea pie and play games of handball. It was summer and the sun was high up and the leaves strong and green, and the days were the kind you'd know Christ died for you, though I envied the others for seeing the mountains again in the weather we were in, for you can see them any side of you, even from the middle of Dublin. This morning I was still in bed.

"Beehaan!"

I fughing near jumped out of my skin. Now what, you louse-bound military bastard, said I to myself, putting down my book. The guard burst open the door of the hut and was on top of me.

"Right!" he said. "Pack up your stuff and don't take all night over it."

"What's up? Are the rest of us for home now?"

"You'll see," standing over me as he spoke.

Fast as I could I jumped out of bed and got dressed and collected my kit and the guard hurried me across the yard to the Reception. Cathal was already there and we nodded to each other and smiled.

"Looks as though we're off."

"Sure thing, kid," Cathal replied, and the other prisoners who had now joined us laughed and joked and pretended to belt into each other with their fists. We were told to stand in a line and there wasn't a man in the line

but that he'd be thinking of his discharge, and the next thing we knew was the guards coming over with long chains and handcuffs.

Lord Jesus, Holy Mary, Mother of God, I would like to die just here, weary of the struggle, to slip out of it, and if I never saw disappointment fall like a cloak over every inch of the others, I experienced it now.

We were handcuffed two by two and the cuffs attached to the two long chains as they had been from Arbour Hill, but this time the chains were not for the coach but for two fughing guards at the end of the line, for we were only being shifted a few yards up the road to a smaller jail, known as the glasshouse. Cathal and I got ourselves handcuffed together and stood in the middle of the do-it-yourself shaft like a bloody pair of drays pulling a coach and twenty-two, and off we went, the next best to anything you might see at the Dublin Horse Show out in Ballsbridge.

The principal officer in our military escort was a small and dangerous-looking bastard who made up for his smallness by aggressiveness. He ran up and down the line, telling everyone to get a move on and waving his baton as he did so and shoving it into the faces of the more innocent-looking of us.

Yes, and you shove it into my face, you puffed up belly-bastard with your shriveled-up Jesus, and you won't know what's hit you until you meet it coming back.

"Don't mind him," Cathal said, "he's only trying to give us the needle."

I was not afraid of him, for if I was afraid of the engine driver, I was not afraid of the oil rag, and I had his measure. He was the type to go sucking round after big bullying ballocks and liked to hear himself described in the pubs locally as "a great little bit of stuff."

"There's only one bloke around here who reckons he's entitled to do any needling and that's himself," I said, and no sooner said than this party of Germans and

Canadians from the collecting base start insulting us. For a moment or so we all stopped in honest amazement, for here were bitter enemies, united in venom against the natives of the state whose hospitality they were enjoying, and united only in their common hatred of us, the Irish Republican Army, while three weeks previously the likes of them were killing one another, chalking it up on the wall or on the wings of their aircraft or whatever they did.

I caught one German by the scruff of his neck.

"Come here," said I, "you skinny-looking Hun bastard. I've only one hand but I've two plates of meat, and I swear if I don't break you with that one hand for a beginning I'll give you a kick up in the balls that you won't be forgetting, not this day nor tomorrow." This is what we call in the slums at home "a Ringsend uppercut," and I would have done so, only the military police drew their revolvers at these heroes of the Second World War and told them to bugger off out of it and leave us alone. A fughing good job they did, because with or without the chains, we'd have given a fair account of ourselves.

Though I suppose the Canadians thought we favored the Germans, and the Germans thought we inclined toward the Allies, in actual fact we were in favor of one side only: that was our own.

*Hillside and valley, prison wall and cave,*
*Trumpet the story of the gallant fight they made,*
*Weary, outnumbered, undaunted, unafraid,*
*Proud marched the soldiers of the rearguard.*

By the time we reached the glasshouse, it was up the bloody big hill, I was tired and hungry and out of humor and was glad that there were no people around to stop and stare at us in our misery—two lines of prisoners on two chains. We trudged into a doorway at the side

of the building and up a flight of stairs where a sergeant unmanacled us and another younger one took our names and went off to report our safe arrival.

We were taken to our cells but not locked in, and we left our kit and went to the dining hall where there was a very good meal prepared for us of ham and potatoes and cabbage which we ate with considerable enjoyment. The cooking was now done by professional Free State Army cooks, rather than by our own boys who had sketchy ideas about what constituted cooking.

We were the only blokes in the glasshouse and we led a very tolerable existence, but there were another eight IRA prisoners up in Port Laoise, or Maryborough Prison as we usually call the State Penitentiary, who were living under very vile conditions, and all of them were wearing only blankets because they had refused to wear prison clothes. For the matter of that, one of them, Sean McCaughey, was to die during my time in the glasshouse. He died on a hunger and thirst strike in May, 1946. Now I knew a number of things about this young man and one of them was that when he was lying in his bed after ten or twelve days with neither a bite to eat nor a sup to drink, the warder came into his cell and threw buckets of water over him saying: "Now, you bastard, if you won't take water one way, you'll bloody well take it another."

On the day of his death, Cathal and I sang all sorts of rebel songs, including one about the coronation:

*"It was on July the twenty-eighth,*
*In the year of thirty-seven,*
*That a fire was lit without ere a grate*
*And the flames leapt up to Heaven.*

*"The King and Queen came sailing down*
*The loch in the best of order,*
*And we welcomed them to Belfast town*
*With a bonfire on the border.*

*"The King walked up and down the deck,*
*Surrounded by his G-Men,*
*The Queen put a muffler round her neck,*
*Assisted by her weemen.*

*"When asked, 'What glare is that I see?'*
*The reply was there in order,*
*'T'is Ireland united in loyalty*
*With a bonfire on the border.'*

*"Some said the flames were Ulster's own,*
*And more they were extraneous,*
*But a Down man swore they lit their lone,*
*That combustion was spontaneous.*

*"A man that loves his King and Queen,*
*And stands for law and order,*
*Said the flames were orange, white and green,*
*In the bonfire on the border."*

With an ever-increasing din that could be heard all over the glasshouse, we united our voices in:

*"Down by the glenside I met an old woman*
*A-plucking young nettles, nor saw I was coming,*
*I listened awhile to the song she was humming:*
*Glory O! Glory O! to the Bold Fenian Men!*

*"Some died by the glenside, some died 'mid the stranger,*
*And wise men have told us their cause was a failure,*
*But they stood by old Ireland an' never feared danger,*
*Glory O! Glory O! to the Bold Fenian Men!*

*"I passed on my way, God be praised that I met her,*
*Be life long or short, I shall never forget her,*

*We may have great men—but we'll never*
*have better,*
*Glory O! Glory O! to the Bold Fenian Men!*"

Which was written by my uncle, Peadar Kearney, to an air he got from an old woman in the Coombe, and has been gloryohed from the national throat so often that it might be thought it grew there.

The firing party for Sean McCaughey was held in Dublin and the Guard of Honor fired revolvers over his coffin.

"From your holster, withdraw. Fire! fire! fire!"

Funnily enough, the Guard of Honor in the Free State Army only use rifles, but in the IRA we never use anything but revolvers. There are six men in our Guard of Honor and eight in the Free State Army who, strangely, give their shooting orders in Irish, whereas ours are given in English. We also have the distinction of using live ammunition.

After the ceremony, Sean's body was taken by special train to Belfast for the burial at Milltown Cemetery. He and the likes of him were brave men. I sat on my bed in the cell and fell to remembering Yeats's poem "Sixteen Dead Men."

*O but we talked at large before*
*The sixteen men were shot,*
*But who can talk of give and take,*
*What should be and what not*
*While those dead men are loitering there*
*To stir the boiling pot?*

The last time I had heard this poem I was with Rory, my brother, in the snug of the Shaky Man's, and an old one had remarked that to take as a headquarters the most prominent target in the whole city was ridiculous strat-

egy and Rory said: "But what sense of theater—what marvelous sense of theater."

I knew what he meant. Hadn't I stood in the Queen's Theater in Dublin with the frenzied Saturday night crowd for the "Transformation Scene: Burning GPO" while the very amplifiers carrying Pearse's oration over the grave of Rossa were deafened in a mad roar of cheering that went on till the darkness came down and we had till the end of the next act to compose our features and look at our neighbors without embarrassment?

In my childhood I could remember the whole week a damn sight better than I can now, for I have learned enough arithmetic to know that I could not possibly have taken part in the Rising, which happened seven years before I was born. Sean McCaughey was getting a good send-off.

In the glasshouse we were allowed to wear our own clothes and were indeed supplied by the Free State Army with a certain type of civilian clothing called Martin Henry's when our own wore out. We all went out to exercise together, marching round behind each other and managing to get in the few words of conversation in the passageway between the exercise yard and the hospital. After a while we discovered that practically anybody, by saying to the doctor that he felt he was suffering from tuberculosis, could get the usual two bottles of stout and twelve ounces of chicken per day.

At one time there was a guy in a prison who stayed in his cell all day refusing to mix with the others, and he got his two of stout and chicken carried to him on account of his nerves, for he said Lord Goddard kept appearing to him in his sleep to welcome him back to dear old blighty. But that wasn't this day nor yesterday, and the doctor rejected me, though I am happy to say he accepted a lot of the other guys, so there was always a bottle of Guinness lying around the place, which is very

welcome after a game of handball played in an old shed round at the back of the exercise yard.

There was this day when Cathal and I were going to the showers after a very serious game of handball.

"Do you remember," says I, "when I slept with you and you put your arm round my neck?" I was fourteen years old at the time and I don't know what reminded me of it because it wasn't something that I thought about one way or another, unless it was to remove the monotony of our days.

"Oh, kip in, Brendan," he said. "I don't think I care to remember that," and he reddened up, kicking the turf in front of him.

"Well, I fughing remember if you don't, you old bastard," and I pretended to give him a thump.

We went to the showers and washed each other's backs and I suppose in that way wiped out our sinfulness.

The Nuremburg trials started toward the end of 1945, and we, extraordinarily enough for prisoners, were universally on the side, not of the prisoners, but of the prosecutors. When you are pinched, you don't expect anyone to lay down the red carpet for you and you'd be a soft eejit to expect anything at all, even though the judge would say that all prejudice must be put out of your mind to the jury. I could see the logic of this hypocrisy, for everyone has his own way of looking at things: you can be a patriot in the one breath and a murderer in the other.

I regret to say that I favored capital punishment at the time, to a limited extent even for a woman, and I felt that justice was being meted out to these people. I am not very proud of these sentiments today.

During the trial Cathal and I were coming in to take a shower after playing a game of handball, and there was this military corporal, a nice decent little round ball of a fellow, an innocent creature from the midlands of Ire-

land, waiting to see us in. He nodded to us, his face open in a smile.

"Hello," said I and I was trying to be clever, I was. "How is the beast of Belsen?"

I did not think it was possible to hurt a Redcap's feelings, but this good little fellow was extremely hurt and I had to apologize to him. And bejasus, not the first nor last of many apologies I've had to make.

We had visits on Saturday afternoons when we sat in compartments like those of a considerate kind of pawn shop and talked across a counter to our relatives and friends in the opposite compartment. A Redcap supervised the proceedings, walking up and down and warning us the time was up, with relief on my part, for I always felt like an ass at a horse show.

Our days in the compound, as we called the glasshouse, were much the same and each day past is like a bank balance growing to a prisoner, but I wasn't thinking of discharge now, though some of the other blokes were. There was one mad Republican among us who I think would have preferred to stay in chokey for the rest of his life, and on into death, if this would help the Republican movement, not alone in the thirty-two counties of Ireland but in Bangkok, Hangchow and Alaska as well.

But this geezer's Republican wrath put years on me, and the dreadful military songs of the Irish Republican Army which he sang with a stirring scream: "Let me carry your cross for Ireland, Lord, the time of our trial draws near!" Except for the fact that he was always singing it, I would have enjoyed the song about the County Down, "There's a rocky old road I would follow."

Except for the absence of women, to which I was accustomed, I did not really suffer any terrible pains, and if there wasn't a deal to be doing, I've never had much difficulty in passing the time, even if it meant just looking out of the window. We were all being left in it together, team-handed, and the glasshouse was not bad for a nick.

The blizzard started late in the autumn, and though the cold was sharp I would have been a lot colder if I'd had to get out and about in it, and because my mind was gone numb from the cold, I couldn't think myself away any more this morning. I began putting an air to an IRA song to keep things going some way.

"*And when the war is over,*
*And dear old Ireland's free,*
*I'll take her to a Church to wed,*
*And a rebel's wife she'll be.*
*We're off to Dublin in the Green, in the*
*Green,*
*Where the helmets glister in the sun,*
*Where the bayonets flash and the rifles crash,*
*To the echo of a Thompson gun.*"

Though devil a fughing helmet I ever saw, and wasn't I the half pay of an idiot to be singing it at all? And I was opened up to be told the incredible news. The government had made an order releasing me at once. There was an amnesty, an amnesty for us all.

When I knew I was going to be free again, I knew I was going to be free again to hunger and to poverty and to no kind of pajamas, not even Free State Army ones. But I knew also I was free to the lights of my native city, which are very large and welcoming. And oh! I don't know, I was young at the time for Jesus' sake.

# NINE

I ONCE HEARD a neo-old IRA man shout up to a well-known public figure who was trying to address a meeting, "You have the best of men in your jails!"

I may not, nor no one belonging to me, have agreed with his opinions, but bejasus, I felt the best of men today, like Shaggy Lad the liveliest day he ever saw. The blizzard was still blowing, lashing up and over the buildings, and by the time I was out the compound it began spitting snow-water and I, for all of that, was reminded of the beautiful days of high summer, the excitement I was in.

I was met by a girl who is married to a friend of mine, the secretary of a greyhound course in Dublin.

"*Céad míle fáilte, Breandán,*" and she put her arms around me and kissed me on the two cheeks.

"*Go raibh maith agat go deo, a ghrá, mar gheall ar an bhfailte lach sin.*" Thank you for ever, love, for that kind welcome, I answered, happy that somebody was eager for me to come back.

So away we went up to Dublin with a good few places to visit and I was bought numerous pints, meeting this one and that, getting credit of my sufferings and not a one missing but a little more beside, and I responded forth by swilling the pints and by singing innumerable

rebel songs, most of which, alas, such is the depravity of the times, contained ballockses of the Roman Emperors.

In the Shaky Man's was a rugged-faced middle-aged man in tweed clothes, as befitted his rank of Englishman, and one would be hard put to tell the man from the horse out in the hunting field, except bejasus, any decent horse would drop dead from the shame if he managed to get up on its back.

"I was at the Isle of Man for my honeymoon," he said, and I thought I was going to be treated to one of those God-damned talks, the likes of which you hear on the BBC Third Program.

"How did that go?" I answered, not caring a fiddler's fugh one way or another.

"Well, we had a great reception leaving it."

I heard subsequently that he became secretary to the British Home Office or something of State, Sir Anthony Ballockshop or Jockstrap or some such name.

We went out of the Shaky Man's, and with an adjournment here and there at The Blue Lion, O'Meara's and Davy Byrne's, we arrived up in Crumlin and I was so maggoty drunk that I can remember nothing more. Till that evening when my father took me out through the city to a big suburban public house known as the Floating Ballroom, where I was warmly greeted by everybody in the place and they piled up loads of Guinness's stout which I was well able to contend with.

Later on we went to a friend's house where they had a piano and a daughter Mary that was able to play it. My father was a great fiddler, and so was my uncle who had a fiddle presented him for writing the Irish National Anthem, and my father played it this night, standing beside the piano, and Mary playing the piano. Then my father sang a song about the potato famine:

*"Oh, the praties they were small over there,*
*Oh, the praties they were small over there,*

*Oh, the praties they were small, but we ate*
*them skin and all,*
*They were better than fugh-all, over there.*"

We all laughed despite the shame and disgrace of the terrible starvation, for honest to Jesus you'd have to laugh at the old fellow, and he'd be nearly putting bits like that into the hymns, only he was never very near where they'd be singing them. The Jack, the printer, sang a stave. He was a short, plump and very cheerful man, a Protestant, working for a Protestant newspaper, the Dublin *Evening Mail*, now unhappily defunct. Whether Protestant or Catholic, it was a paper of the native Dubliner and had existed since 1823 and was the only Irish newspaper that ever wrote an editorial in my favor.

This was just a couple of years ago when I was in the extraordinary position of receiving very high honors in France and Sweden and England and America and various other little places, while so far as the Irish bourgeoisie was concerned and the Irish amateur intelligentsia, I was the back of the neck. This did not concern me, because first of all if you had a play on for two weeks in Dublin, that would be quite a run. But they resented my success in little villages like Paris and Stockholm and London and New York and they attributed this success to the fact that I ridiculed my Faith and my Fatherland.

I have never ridiculed my Faith, but as regards my Fatherland, the first duty of a writer is to let his Fatherland down, otherwise he is no writer. In the name of Jesus, how the hell can a writer attack anyone else's Fatherland if he doesn't attack his own?

The editorial in the *Evening Mail* was headed simply, BRENDAN BEHAN. "Behan has brought great honour to his native city. We don't say his native country, because we don't circulate very much outside the area of the city of Dublin."

The song Jack sang, oddly enough, was from the Ja-

cobite wars and favored King James against King William.

*Do you remember, long ago, Kathleen?*
*When your lover whispered low,*
*"Shall I stay or shall I go, Kathleen?"*
*And you answered proudly, "Go!*
*"And join King James and strike a blow*
*"For the Green!"*

Kathleen is my mother's name and maybe Jack thought the song about her.

Mary was a lovely girl, about my own age and weight, in fact, but I hadn't the courage to try. So myself and herself we sang duets mostly of the songs of Thomas Moore, a man for whom I have a great affection. He was a friend of Robert Emmet's and it was said that he would often have George IV in tears by singing songs about Robert Emmet's sad life and execution and love affair with Sarah Curran who cared so much about him that she married a Highland officer the year after he was dead. *C'est la vie.*

Mary must have been warmed by these songs, for afterward we got quite friendly and I brought her out a couple of times during the next week, and if I say so myself, I was not quite so awkward as an ex-Borstal, ex-convict might be expected to be with a girl.

For days following I drank everything that was to be found in the line of porter, though I kept off the hard stuff, until my mother suggested I go out and do a bit of a job and knock out something for herself and the family. I looked out of the window and shuddered but she was adamant. And, alas, not the worst of us is free from the improving influence of a good woman.

I gave my union card to the surly-looking individual in charge, and when he read my name, by the looks on his face, I think he would have liked to give the twenty-

six counties back to the English, as long as I was in on the deal, but he gave me a job.

I was to go down to Caherdaniel in the South of Ireland to repair and restore the home of Daniel O'Connell, known as "The Liberator," because he's supposed to have given us Catholic emancipation, but he was also the man who called out the British troops against the Irish workers when he was lord mayor of the city in 1843. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, it was a terrible job, but I was more frightened of the curses of my mother than I was of refusing the job, so I took it.

I was practically born in the pot, for my father and my grandfathers were painters and my earliest recollections would be of my father in overalls, carrying brushes and paint and sometimes glazing tools. I was a fourth-year apprentice to the painting trade myself, and I'd been two years in the Day Apprentice School in Dublin so I was given the job of painter-in-charge. They were a good bunch of fellows on the whole, and we all called each other by nicknames out of the painter's Bible, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* by Robert Tressall, although a lot of them had never read the book, nor any other book, either.

However, there was one tight-lipped, mean scab-bastard who would have shopped his mother for the inch she stood on, and for the first time in my life I sacked a man and I sacked him for this reason. I'd a thirst on me and was repairing it in a public house not an ass's bawl from O'Connell's house, when this man comes up to me and says: "Mr. Behan, are you the painter-in-charge here?"

"I am," I says.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing and that's not two, there are a number of your painters and other workers drinking across the street."

"And I'll tell you what you can do," I said. "You can take your three cards, unemployment insurance, National Health Insurance, and wet time (for everyone in

the building trade receives compensation when the weather is too bad for work) and one is to go away, the second to stop away and the third not to come back."

I'd have been glad to give him a lesson and maybe the knee, too, up into his marriage prospects, but he didn't hang around long enough. With me at the time was the OC of the London IRA who'd got a sentence of twenty years in England but was let out after ten.

"I sacked that fellow," I said.

"How the hell did you come to sack anybody, Brendan?"

"Well, if he grassed on his mates even, what's he going to do about us?"

We had a few more rounds and were joined by some other blokes who were now on their dinner break and we fell to discussing the funds for the restoration of the Liberator's home and how they were obtained from all over the world. A young girl, who happened to be Jewish, mentioned the Pope.

"Oh, fugh the Pope," I said, and most of them laughed at this, but one old man, a sharp-featured shopkeeper by the looks of him, glared at me in nationalistic fashion, his countenance, if it ever can be so described, assuming an indignant expression.

"I'll have you know, young puppy," he said, "that the Pope has subscribed five thousand pounds for the restoration of Daniel O'Connell's old home."

Just as well, I said in my own mind, for I don't notice the likes of you putting your hands in your pockets to keep the place from falling into rack and ruin. Instead, we all agreed that the Pope was a good man, the Pope was a beautiful fellow, and the Jewish girl searched every inch of our faces to be sure we weren't codding her.

That Sunday, at Mass, I saw her and she was looking up in ecstasy at the altar and at the priest and I thought to myself that converts make the best Catholics by times. Until I noticed a large and hairy hand was up her clothes, and it was the hand of an ex-IRA man who'd

been born in a barracks in London, where his father was the regimental sergeant-major at the time.

The priest who was taking the service was a namesake of mine, Father Behan, and it has been indicated that I was popularly believed to be his son, which as far as I know I'm not. But he was a very dear friend of mine. I remember one day being in the sacristy with him. He showed me the monstrance and where the precious stones had been prized out of it.

"Would you look at that, Brendan?" he said.

Jesus, I thought, could you leave anything out of your hands after that, with the robbers that are going nowadays?

Now Father Behan was a good and very loyal priest. In his diocese at one part of a very lonely road nearby where we were restoring the house there was a shooting of an old man who'd given Ireland no service but a wrong one. The police came down in droves but couldn't find out anything about it, for the Irish, for all their peculiarities, are not a nation of shoppers.

A little while later, after I had kipped in for the night, Father Behan came to see me.

"Would you ever come out and give me a hand?" he said.

Now I am a very easily terrified man and I'd seen nothing in England or in Ireland to prepare me for this. I saw a woman who'd hanged herself and it was said that she died because she knew the murderer of the old man.

Father Behan, his boy and I, we cut down this poor, still lovely woman, and the priest breathed a few words of the Catholic religion, as it would be, over her on this and the last day. At that point I fainted.

When I recovered, we gently lifted the dead woman and placed her in the ponytrap, and Father Behan leaned over her and very lovingly gave her the last rites as well as he could. I don't know what happens when people commit suicide, but I do know that they are not altogether out of the church.

I was at this poor woman's funeral later, and these things to me are like blood to the eyes. She was attended by her family and her relations. During the service, Father Behan stood up.

"This woman," he said, "I think she did not know what she was doing. I think she was mad."

We took her at dead of night to her grave in consecrated ground, over the Kerry mountains and under the Kerry sky and looking far away over the Atlantic, watched by the Blasket Islands lying out in the bay. Afterward I asked Father Behan if it was right to give her the last sacraments.

"Brendan," he answered, "who are we to judge? Maybe it was an accident."

I was never so proud of the Catholic clergy before as I was this day, for my early experiences in jail in England had given me the idea that religion of any description had nothing to do with mercy or pity or love.

# TEN

We left Caherdaniel early in the morning and drove back up to Dublin. It had been a hard job and toward the end we had worked over the time and at great speed, almost throwing the paint on with four-inch flat brushes.

Now it was all over and, having the energy to spare for it, we sang a bit of a song:

*"With your left right, right about turn, this*
*is the way we go,*
*Charging with fixed bayonets, the terror of*
*every foe,*
*The glory of ould Ireland and a thousand*
*buccaneers,*
*And a terror to creation are the Dublin*
*Fusiliers."*

While the other blokes sang another verse, I fell to wondering how it was that in two generations the Dublin Fusiliers had been forgotten, for by Christ they were fair enough to shed their blood in countless thousands. I had an uncle in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers who was killed at Menin in the First World War, and each year the Belgian Army has rather a polite custom of sounding the last post at the Menin Gate. I was over for it once, blood being thicker than water, I suppose. My father

stole his rifle, but he used it against the British Army instead of using it in the British Army. But when my uncle was knocked off, my grandmother had a pension for him from His Majesty's government of the time.

We sang and drank our way for several hours, till the sun went down and us in Dublin in the dark. There was an elderly woman in the snug of the Shaky Man, and having got a pint in my hand, I went across to her, more in the mind of civility than for other reason.

"Good evening, Maria," I said, "and how's yourself?"

She lifted her face from out her shawl. "Not too bad, Brendan," she said.

"And how's the oul fellow?" meaning her husband.

"Oh, he's working in London in an ammunition works down in Woolwich. He's not getting a whole lot, around ten pounds a week."

"How's Sean?"

"Ah, Sean is doing a bit better than that. The oul fellow sends me home six pounds and drinks four. Sean now is a grand lad. He's in an aeronautical works and he's making airplanes and he sends home four pounds a week."

"Tell me, how about Mary?"

"Don't mention that whore to me. She's in the chapel praying we'll never have another war."

The next morning I am walking up Grafton Street, minding my own business, when Michael O'Flaherty, a house painter friend of mine, stops me.

"Would you ever do an unofficial job, Brendan?"

"Well," says I, "I've never been notorious for doing anything except unofficial jobs. There is only one thing I like better than an unofficial job, and that's an unofficial strike, and there's only one thing I like better than an unofficial strike and that's an unofficial lightning strike."

"Do you remember Dick Timmons?"

"Aye, sure and I do."

"He's serving out a long sentence over in England."

"Tut, tut," I said, "we must do something about that."

"There's a fellow there, over in England, who wants me to take him out of jail."

I started laughing thinking of it.

"There are a lot of people who want to be taken out of jail," I said.

Michael thought I was taking him for a right eejit and it didn't altogether please him.

"This man happens to be a fellow citizen of yours, a Dublin man, born in Capel Street."

Now I was reared a strict Dubliner and my mother was born in Capel Street, so I felt a bit ashamed for having laughed.

"Well enough," I said, "I'll help." Which was a great piece of foolhardiness on my part, I must say, but then that's the way I was in those days, and in these.

I went up to my home and collected a few things and arranged to meet Barry O'Sullivan, an Irish-American who was a fine soldier and a very good Irish patriot. He was to give me his passport for the trip over. Michael had fixed up for me to have a revolver and for an RAF bloke to give me his identity card and service paybook and we were all to meet on the hour in Donal's pub.

Donal himself was behind the counter this morning, and muttering to himself in Waterford Irish, which was a habit of his when he was off the gargle. He was a man of fifty-six or fifty-seven and I sometimes joined in his muttering. When he was in the withdrawal stages from a bash at the bottle, I could even say his part of the dialogue and make him say things he had no intention of saying, such as giving me a round of drinks on credit, which he might normally not wish to do.

But today he had not reached the withdrawal stage, and I paid for my pint when Michael and Barry arrived in with the necessary documents. We stayed awhile having a jar and me rather enjoying the thoughts of visiting England, after an enforced absence of nearly six years, to give a fellow a tug, which was a great piece of

impertinence on my part and some would say very foolhardy, as I said before.

Outside Donal's we gripped hands and I was given the revolver, and we talked a few moments, shook hands again and then parted, me to go to Belfast and the others about their business. I had a good few places to visit on the way up to the border, and with an odd adjournment, I had been the best part of five days traveling before I got to Belfast. As my delay was not exactly what you might call in the line of business, I looked through my pockets to make sure I still had the necessary documents.

Barry had on his passport "one artificial eye," which I had not noticed when I met him, and I hoped the same would go for me. The doctrinaire stated that my wife was expecting a baby, and of course I'd no wife and no baby, both of which malefactions I have made up for since. I did not concentrate on the fact that I was a day later than this document allowed for embarkation. I handed over the papers to a seedy-looking official who asked me why was I wearing a civilian suit and why was I a day late. In those days anyone traveling on service permits was usually expected to wear the uniform of whatever service he was in, but I made out I'd been on compassionate leave and had to stay the extra day because of the wife's pregnancy.

Eventually I was allowed to board the ship, the *Ulster Monarch*, for Liverpool, which was full of servicemen, and I got exceedingly drunk on the journey for I have discovered no better way of doing your work as a soldier of the Irish Republic than by getting drunk.

Standing at the bar next to me was a Jewish fellow of about forty-eight, small but comfortably furnished with brown hair.

"What's your number?" he said. "When do you get out?" meaning when would I return to civvy street.

"My number is seventy," says I, which is the number of my parents' house in Dublin, and I explained I was in the RAF just back from leave.

"Look Behan, I know you and you're not in the Royal Air Force. If your number is seventy, you should have been let out with the Royal Flying Corps about 1919."

But he smiled as he said this and was friendly with it.

"Well, so what?" I said. "What number should I say?"

"Say any fughing number you like, but for Jasus' sake don't say a low number," and he paused as if to give the matter great thought. "Say 1970."

"Okay," I said, "suits me," and we picked up our pints on the counter beside us and pulled on them with great satisfaction. We stayed at the bar for the rest of the journey with my companion speaking with ardor about his services to King and Empire, though I couldn't discover what these were, the element of secrecy was so vital.

After we docked at Liverpool, all the servicemen were marched out in file for inspection, and I noticed an ugly-looking sergeant who was paying me particular attention. Jesus, and I nearly having an accident for wondering how I was going to get out of this little situation of carrying a revolver.

I went over to this fellow, whose name I would give except for the fear of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Scotland Yard, and I clicked my heels smartly and said:

"Sergeant."

"Yeh, what do you want?"

"I would like to go to the lavatory."

"What you want is a bottle of gin for your kidneys," but he said okay all the same and I fell out the ranks and got on a tram.

Fugh you and the RAF, I said in my mind.

I went straight away to see Eddie, the Dublin guy, who gave me the information as to where we might pick up the contacts for to get Dick out of the shovel-and-pick, the nick, and we went down to a place in Gloucestershire and successfully gave him the tug.

Even at this stage of the game, it would not do to go into details as to how this was done. It was a highly or-

ganized operation and one that required a deal of planning and I would not like to spoil the game for others by shooting my mouth off now.

We "borrowed" a lorry belonging to the Royal Army Service Corps, commonly known as the strawberry jam robbers, and brought Dick back from Gloucestershire to Liverpool, avoiding hundreds of horrible-looking police dogs, which I for one didn't care to see.

By God, we were good men in those days.

There was a car waiting for us at Liverpool, an old Austin belonging to Eddie's brother, which he had bought it out of his gratuity when he left the RAF, and it was all fixed that we would drive to Bradford to the house of an Englishman where we would sleep the night.

Travel is a great inducer of gloom, for man is not made for so much running around, and by the time we arrived we were all kind of upset blokes. Though people think it's the terrors that go scarpering, it's mostly not and we were in the torment of our thoughts.

The front door opened before we were out of the car, and a small man of about forty beckoned to Eddie, who was driving, to take the car a little way up the road behind a hedge, and he called to Dick and myself to go on in the house.

Charlie, the Englishman, had been given a life sentence but had only done a stretch of six years. I was curious to know what he'd done for so heavy a sentence, so I asked Eddie who said that he'd found a soldier with his mother and he'd hacked the soldier up. But there were extenuating circumstances and considerable leniency was shown, and quite rightly so in my opinion.

I never saw such a night for rain. As I lay warm, dry and well-fed in bed, I felt we were making out all right, at least for the moment. Dick whispered across to me, "There'll be some screws out tonight looking for me."

"I'd sooner you than me, kid," I said as I listened to the rain pelting off the windows.

"Shower of fughing sods!"

We fell asleep thinking of them all out there, cold and miserable and drenching. But it would roll off them, I said to myself. They'd get rusty before they'd get pneumonia.

From Bradford we drove to Manchester to the home of the parents of a friend of mine who'd been in the same block as me in Mountjoy Jail. The father had been a compositor on the *Irish Press*, which is De Valera's newspaper, and he took the tape of the telex about his own son's death and fainted at the machine. This unfortunate boy was cycling up Holles Street, past the hospital where I was born, when a police car shot out of a turning and one of the brave and very drunken gunmen of the Irish Special Branch shoved a machine gun out of the side of the car and shot him in the back.

The parents gave us a very warm welcome, took us in without questions and that night I shared the bed with Gerry, another son, who was a clerical student. We had been lying there some time and everyone in the house was settled down for the night and I could see Gerry's face mostly hidden in the blankets and lit in the glow of his cigarette. He reached over and I caught it from his fingers and put it in my mouth. I blew into the dark above me and whispered, "Do you remember your brother?"

He did not answer at once, and then said, more softly still, "Yes, a little bit."

So I sang a song for him:

*"Oft times I sit by my lone and ponder,*
*On the times we had in the days now gone,*
*When I see a smile on your picture yonder,*
*I hear your voice in a well-loved song.*
*But now you're lying, where the breeze is sighing,*
*Through the cold wet grass that is growing o'er*
*The lonely grave where yourself is laid,*

*My friend has left me and my heart is sore.*
*No more we'll argue the high thought of ages,*
*Or join his voice in a roaring song,*
*For one is but half a pair of sages,*
*And the bass is dumb when the tenor's gone.*
*He'll not confound me, with wise words*
*drown me,*
*In discourse down me, for he's no more,*
*Our speech is lonely with one voice only,*
*My friend has left me and my heart is sore."*

I whispered good night to him, and drew softly and invisibly on my cigarette, listening to the wind outside and thinking of the bastards of the police murdering an innocent young boy. But it was not all harshness I had in mind.

I was at school at the Irish Christian Brothers from whom I parted by mutual consent in 1936. But I was informed by them, during a lesson, that during the Troubles the women of the working-class areas in Dublin made cans of tea and sandwiches for the British troops. Not that the sandwiches would have been very sumptuous, for they consisted of bread, margarine and tinned beef, which is all the people had.

I rushed home to tell my grandmother.

"You'd four sons fighting on the barricades in the Easter week rising," I said. "Is it really true that the women of Dublin, and in the slums in particular, that they fed the British Army?"

"Certainly," she said. "I fed them myself."

"In the name of Jesus, how would you allow for that?"

"Brendan," she said, "there were some mothers reared them and God help them, they didn't know whether they were in Holland or Iceland. They only knew one thing. That they were there to fight and they were wearing khaki uniforms and had rifles and at the end of it all, they were only bits of chaps."

And I lay on my bed that night and reflected on these

things and felt, in my opinion, that that is what happens to make a woman. I shut my eyes and let on to myself to be asleep, and then I did go to sleep.

We left early in the morning and drove to Leeds. It was one of those days that you'd feel like coming back to life, to be open and in the air, with the green grass and the trees. I was fed up with the swings, traveling from Lancashire to Yorkshire, but when you're on the move you're on the move, and the brightness of the sun can only improve things. By the time we reached the outskirts of Leeds we were in the height of good humor and we stopped for a rosiner. It was at a place called Cross Flats Park, which is in a suburb somewhere on the tramline past Armley Prison. I remember it (the park, not the shovel-and-pick) because there was a kiosk in the middle that had tables for games and chairs where old men and women sat round and talked or played shove ha'-penny.

The three of us stood with the people outside looking in, for there was a notice that read, "No admittance, except by special invitation, to anyone under sixty-five years old."

Needless to say I got a special invitation and took the others in with me. In the middle of the crowded room there was a gentleman like Wilfred Pickles leading choruses of old songs with an accordion. Nothing loath, as the man said first removing a jockey of Tullamore tobacco from his jaw, I got up and sang an Irish song, "In Glendalough Lived an Ould Saint," and received much *bualadh bas*. Amid the Yorkshire talk, "Good lad, Paddy," and so forth, I heard one aged gurrier distinctly use the words: "*Maith an bhuachaill thú.*"

God bless my soul, said I, or words to that effect, looking around for the source of this salutation. I saw an old man smiling beside me and he said, "*Cé'n caoi 'bhfuil tú, Paddy?*"

"*Táimse go maith, go raibh maith agat,*" said I in some wonder.

"That's as far as I can, lad," said he and told me a bit about himself. He was from Leeds, had been born and raised there and, except for the First World War, had never been outside of it.

But his parents were from the Joyce country, and he said:

"Fifty years ago round York Road, with all the old people on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings when they met together, it was always Irish they used. We young ones couldn't help picking up a bit here and there, listening to them."

We left the kiosk like Early Christian martyrs and got back into the car. People have gone into jail with less reluctance but we didn't want to push our luck too far. In the center of the city we stopped at Albert Cowling's Wine Lodge, which I heartily recommend for a good sup and a bite. Whatever else ails me, it is a bar I shall never forget, for on the walls of the lavatory were written many things.

"What do you think of our pub here?" Mr. Cowling asked me.

"I think it is excellent," I said.

"And what about the writing on the walls down there?" he said.

"Well," said I, being a very hypocritical man, "I think it is pretty disgusting. Do you not want it taken off? You should have your walls washed."

"Have them washed?" he exclaimed. "I'm going to have them varnished!"

That night we slept in a barn with a horse that was making so much row that I thought he must have been mending his own shoes. Jasus, all the sins of his past life must have passed in front of him that night.

I was thankful to see the dawn, until I noticed a man looking across at us through the window, and I was nearly going to put one through him with the revolver when Dick shouts out, "Don't shoot, for God's sake! He's only a taxidermist."

Apparently he was quite a famous person and Dick had met him before, so he was able to recognize him. Sure enough, the old fellow was holding up at the window stuffed dogs, cats and other animals. I think he must have thought that we were down-and-outs, or something, and maybe would like the job of stitching them up for the price of a pint. We shook our heads at him, and after a little while he went away.

This day, Eddie, Dick and myself drove down the town instead of moving off, for we were waiting information as to when to drive to Liverpool to get a boat across, and there was a former prisoner in Leeds who we thought might help us. We parked the car in the center of the town and walked the rest of the distance. A back-handed compliment, but Leeds is not what you'd expect at all, for it is a clean, bright and pleasant city, in which I remember the Swinegate, bluntly named as befits a street in the capital of Yorkshire, with an old bridge over a little river at the end of it.

On the way up to the house we passed some policemen smoking and chatting and having an easy time for themselves. They drew to one side to let us pass.

"I wonder who they think we are?" I said.

"Probably the blokes that would call round the back for the pig-feeding," said Dick.

"Fair enough," I said, "but if they wondered at all, they'd probably only think we're three Irish boys out for a walk." Which I suppose in a way is exactly what we were.

At the house we learned we were to go back to Manchester to the house of an Irish woman who owned a public house. The blessings of Jesus on you, I said in my own mind. I was beginning to enjoy the swings.

*You'd think 'twas a crime to be human,*
*To sometimes get scared in the Park,*
*When a copper sneaks up there behind you,*
*And flashes his light in the dark.*
*To regard savage dogs with suspicion,*
*In case that the bastards would bite,*
*To be hauled off to jail on suspicion,*
*And scared of a scream in the night.*

## ELEVEN

"LISTEN NOW, and for Jesus' sake, Brendan, shouting there at the top of your bloody voice. I suppose you want the pair of us to get run in, to get pitched out of this place?" This was Dick, and a bit savage about it, as we drove on the journey from Sheffield to Manchester. I could see he was a kind of upset man so I muttered "I'm sorry," in a low solemn voice, rather like a Sinn Fein speaker after saying "nineteen-sixteen." For the rest of the drive we did sod all, except smoke, and I listened to Dick telling both Eddie and me what he was done for, and how he was done, and not minding a word of what he was saying for I was thinking of the pull I would be getting at the public house the other end. And there was no shortage of ammunition either, meaning money, although not as much as we would need for the long haul.

It's a queer world, God knows, but I have discovered that there are money-raising funds for practically every kind of organization. I knew of a fund in Ireland for giving money to distressed Protestants, but not many of the natives would say they were Protestants to qualify for the grant. I think I would get converted if they would give me a lump sum and finish it up, and then I'd get back to being a Catholic. I mean it is a dangerous way of getting a few quid, from a spiritual point of view.

I might get run over by a motor car or something and die in heresy.

On the strength of these thoughts, I persuaded Eddie to stop the car, as we were nearly at the Irish woman's home, for me to give myself a stiff glass of malt. The place was empty except for two elderly ladies, a pensioner from the Indian Army and a silver merchant up at the counter, and before the hour had passed we knew all belonging to each other since the Ark.

Our mot in Manchester was an extremely nice woman, and I left Dick and Eddie with her because I had to find a sailor by the name of William Scurrie, a very noble fellow, who is since dead. But to get in touch with William Scurrie, I had to go to the home of Stephen Lally who lived in Manchester.

Stephen Lally was a brave soldier of England and a very brave soldier of Ireland and a good-tempered example to anyone of how to give a knock and take one without doing your nut over it. I am inclined to lose my temper sometimes, and on this occasion when I had to contact Stephen to get in touch with William Scurrie, I won't forget his example.

We had to make a telephone call to Rory Brugha in Ireland, and under the circumstances a private house in Manchester was not exactly the best place from which to make it. Although I believed that soldiers, police and warders were for the most part an ignorant body of men, I did not want to make it too easy for any old John Bull's bastard of a copper to find me. A cousin of mine, who is in the Irish Guards, was stationed in London at the time, so we decided to scarper to the Smoke, make the telephone call and come back to Manchester immediately afterward.

You may find it hard to believe that I ever had relations in the army since I don't think I ever took any organizations of a military nature seriously, other than the IRA, but the fact remains that this cousin of mine got the Military Medal in the last war, which was not

given away with the rations. At the risk of losing my visa to visit the States, I may say that every time an American crosses the Atlantic, he seems to get a medal, upon which grounds I should be entitled to about twenty of them.

However, at this stage of the game, both Stephen and myself were short of money for the fare, but into Thy Hands I commended my spirit, Lord Jesus, for didn't Stephen have a lodger who'd kept some money for to visit his sister who was a nurse in London? He lent us ten pounds and as quick as a wink we were on the train. There was a lovely girl in our carriage, but she wasn't having any just then, and I have a stammer at times, and it made me worse and more nervous and not very able to speak to anyone by the time we reached London.

"That will teach you not to act like a registered ponce," said Stephen.

We went and saw the cousin and asked him if I could make a telephone call over to Ireland without anyone hearing me.

"Sure," he said, "we'll go up to Chelsea Barracks."

Now there was a young boy sitting at the telephone in the Barracks which was the one I wanted to use, because it was in a recess away from everyone else. The poor little bugger had probably waited all day to speak to his mot in Poplar or Balham with no one else around to jeer, and he was reluctant to give up his place to a strange mick.

"Look," I said, "you bloody little short-arsed ---t, get off that fughing chair," for I really had my spike up now and I aimed a kick at him when I let on to be aiming at the chair.

"Surprised at you, Brendan," Stephen said quietly, and I did not forget it.

However, I made the call to Rory Brugha, who, despite the fact that he is a capitalist, is a very good friend of mine, and to make a call of this nature from Chelsea Barracks might sound extraordinary to anybody who

doesn't understand Ireland and England, but the way you have to look at it is this:

*Who made you lance-corporal?*
*Who made you lance-corporal?*
*Who made you lance-corporal,*
*When you couldn't do orderly man?*

*When I was young, I used to be,*
*As fine a man as ever you'd see,*
*And the Prince of Wales, he says to me,*
*"Come, join the British Army."*

*Toora loora loora loo,*
*They're looking for monkeys up in the zoo.*
*And if I had a face like you,*
*I'd join the British Army.*

*Sarah Curley baked the cake;*
*'Twas all for poor Kate Condon's sake,*
*I threw meself into the lake,*
*Pretending I was barmy.*

*Toora loora loora loo,*
*'Twas the only thing that I could do,*
*To work me ticket home to you,*
*And leave the British Army.*

It was late when we came out of the Barracks and too late for the train to Manchester.

"What a lovely night," said my cousin, and yes, said I, in my own mind, if I had anything to go with it. But it was a good night and even warm, except for a breeze springing up. We walked slowly along the King's Road and then my cousin remembered a girl he had once met who worked in a nightclub somewhere off the Edgware Road.

"She's a smasher, Brendan," he said, "and half Irish too."

In normal circumstances I'd have said I don't give a

fish's tit what she is as long as she is ready for *that*, but my cousin is a decent skin, and in any event he was taking me for a rosiner and I didn't want to offend him, so I just said, "A lot of people I've met in England seem to be of Irish descent, particularly in the various jails I was in. And to prove that they were as British as anyone else, they were worse to me than anyone else."

We got on a bus to Marble Arch and walked the short distance down the Edgware Road to the club, when my cousin spots the girl sitting at a table by herself. When all fruit fails, welcome haws.

"This is Frankie Mahoney," said the cousin, giving me the nod as he did so, "and he is over here on a few days' holiday, having spent most of his time fighting for the cause of good old Ireland, he and all belonging to him."

"Ah," she said with an Irish country accent which she tried to overload with imitation cockney, "my heart is always with the boys. Long live the Republicans is what I always say. Where were you in jail, sir? My father was in Dartmoor. Mr. de Valera was there, too. Real high class, you know. Look at De Valera now, twenty-two thousand a year and a palace above in the Phoenix Park. And he started in Dartmoor with my poor old father. That's what I always say, if you want to get on you have to go in. I was in the 'Joy' myself often enough to be President of Ireland three times over."

By now I was in good humor and the night was fine and I began doing the big shot, the sophisticate type who had been in most of the jails.

"In New York," I said, "the jail is called Sing Sing, and in Rome it is called Regina Coeli, which means Queen of Heaven, while in Paris it is called La Sante, which means Health."

She was obviously impressed. "Can you speak French?" she said.

"A little. I have a great interest in French life, in the French language and in French loving."

"How dare you! How dare you mention such things!

You dirty bastard," she said, "a dog has more manners."

"It's all equal to me whether you fancy her or not," said Stephen, interrupting, "but you can fancy her without passing remarks on the girl of the like and she good enough to be sitting among us."

"Oh, kip in sometime, for Christ's sake," said I.

"He's a fughing sex mechanic, I reckon," said my cousin, laughing, and he began telling us about his judies and debating whether a man could ponce on more than one judy at once. Which, I suppose, is mostly what any geezer talks about, but Stephen was bored. We left the joint and walked the distance to Euston to catch the early morning train back to Manchester.

I suffer from a weakness of character that I can't keep up indignation for long, and although I was sorry because I was beginning to fancy a bit of fruit again, I wasn't bitter. When I am in good humor, I could not be bitter about anything.

In the train, I began telling Stephen about the pictures I'd seen, because I went to two shows a week from the time I was four for nothing, as my uncle owned a cine-variety house in Dublin and a picture house in Ringsend. And then I fell to remembering my grandmother, who lived in the next house to ours, where she occupied the back top room with her son, Paddy, the Lord have mercy on him, for he is now dead. He was a stepbrother of my father, because my grandmother, like my mother, married twice.

Mrs. Murphy had a cat called Minnie and I could never eat Quaker Oats for years because she used to feed Minnie on these oats. She used to get money out of the Church of Ireland, which is the Protestant church, and out of the Roman Catholic Church, because, alternately, she claimed to be a member of both. She also had a picture of Daniel O'Connell, the Catholic fountainhead of Irish Independence, and of Queen Victoria. When she sent for the Protestant minister, who was a Salvation Army officer, she would tell me to climb up and take down the

picture of Daniel O'Connell and put up Queen Victoria.

"I could die happy," she would tell the poor unfortunate man, "if you gave me a few shillings here and there," and the minister would hand her a donation of ten shillings.

When the priest would come, she'd tell me to take down Queen Victoria and put up Dan O'Connell.

"I could die happy, Father, if only I had the few shillings that I owe the neighbors," she would say.

Afterward, she would immediately turn to me. "Run over across to the corner, son, and order a dozen of Guinness stout," which we call "the product."

However, she got so sick that my grandmother, who was a master of ceremonies at these affairs, took matters into her own hands.

"Mrs. Murphy," she said, "I'm afraid we must get you into Hospice for the Dying."

"Horse piss for the dying!" said the old lady in shocked tones. "Jasus, these are quare times."

Eventually Mrs. Murphy agreed to enter the Hospice for the Dying, and myself and my grandmother and Mrs. MacHugh and one or two others went over with her.

We left in a horse-drawn cab at about ten o'clock in the morning, and the minute the public houses were open, Mrs. Murphy suggested the "message."

"Ah, dear Jesus. I don't like to pass that old pub. Many's the pleasant hour spent. Can we not go in for the last drink?"

My grandmother was always amenable to a request of this nature. "Certainly, Mrs. M.," she said, and she banged on the glass partition between us and the cab driver. "Jarvey, pull up here at the pub on the corner, Jemmy Gills."

So we climbed out of the cab and I was delighted at what these old women would be got up to, but I had to let on to be terrified.

"Give us four pints and four half ones of whiskey,"

said my grandmother, "and I think the lad will have a dandy glass of stout."

I had my wine glass of porter and the others had their pints and their whiskey. The chat between my grandmother and Mrs. Murphy came to me, and my grandmother told Mrs. Murphy not to mind my drinking stout for if I had it now I would never know the taste of it later when I grew up. Alas, that was where Aughrim was lost.

In and out the next pub we were, and in like a shot with us to a third, until eventually we were over to the south side of the city and across the Liffey, of which river it was said when I was a child: "You pull the chain and in a jiffey, your shit is floating down the Liffey." Somebody once said that "Joyce has made of this river the Ganges of the literary world" but sometimes the smell of the Ganges of the literary world is not all that literary.

After having visited about seven public houses on the north side of Dublin, we proceeded to do a little drinking on the south side. We emerged from a public house opposite the Hospice for the Dying at eight o'clock in the evening, having left our native northeast at ten o'clock in the morning and I was twisted, as the saying has it, physically as well as in the other way. My head was sunk on my left shoulder.

In the spills of rain, an old gentleman came over to my grandmother.

"That's a beautiful boy," he said. "'Tis a pity he's deformed."

"The curse of Jesus on you. That child is not deformed. He's just got a couple of drinks taken."

The Reverend Mother came to the door of the place and, seeing the condition we were in, told us to go away.

"We have a patient for you," said my grandmother, and, "That's right," puts in Mrs. Murphy. "I'm your patient and you'll be doing my soul the height of injury if you do not let me in."

And she breathed the fumes of drink so much that the holy nun herself was nearly set drunk by it, but not relenting. "This place is for the dying," she said.

"Ah," said Mrs. Murphy, "I am dying, and if I'm not dying now I'll be dying in the morning."

We made our lazy way home. Now in this tenement house where Mrs. Murphy lived, there would have dwelt about thirty people and they had all taken out an insurance policy on her life, and although they liked her, pain of her death would be eased by the fact that the Prudential of the Royal Liver and the like would be handing over what to them was substantial sums of money when she died. The holding of her body, below on this earth, mattered to them all.

"Poor Mrs. Murphy," they'd say happily. "She had a very bad night."

But Mrs Murphy was doing all right. She was getting a drop of whiskey from one and a bottle of stout from the other and Minnie, the cat, was getting her Quaker Oats, and altogether it was quite a happy deathbed. Until this day when Mrs. Kenny from the Strawberry Beds was laying her out and she pulling the wedding ring off Mrs. Murphy's finger.

"Kenny," said Mrs. Murphy, waking up, "put back me bit of gold," upon which Mrs. Kenny fainted, because she thought she was dealing with a corpse.

Mrs. Murphy had a nephew, who like herself often alternated between religions. At one stage of the game he even attempted to become a Jew, but an examination of his physiognomy would have shown that he was not one. The neighbors gathered around the nephew and told him that his aunt did not seem to be dying very happily and that you might as well be out of the world, as out of fashion. And they kept it up like mad things, until at last the nephew sent for a wise woman from the country, Mrs. Cloonoe.

Mrs. Cloonoe was distinguished by the fact that she'd pushed her drunken husband into the canal at Mullingar

and, in the opinion of the neighbors, this made her a very wise woman indeed. Her husband was a former sergeant-major in the British Army and he used to get his wife out on the floor at half-two in the morning doing foot-drill and bayonet practice with the sweeping brush.

"Right," he would say. "Shoulder arms, present arms, *fire!*" And would then do a bayonet charge on her as if she was the German Army and he the British Infantry. She got kind of fed up with this and, as I say, she pushed him into the canal.

Mrs. Cloonoe was now sent for to give her expert advice upon Mrs. Murphy and her passing.

"Ah, well, Jesus," she said, "how could the woman die with a pillow under head? Pull the pillow out for Jesus' sake."

And for the first time in my life, I saw Mrs. Murphy terrified, as well she might be, as the pillow was snatched from under her head. In a second she was gone to her Maker, under the auspices of which Church I'm not quite sure.

She lay that night in the mortuary chapel and we had a few prayers, and Mrs. Kyle, our coalman, was there, the mortuary being nice and handy on her way to delivering the coal to the neighbors. She had a son, and how either one of them came into the world is beyond me, for she was extremely mannish and her son was extremely girlish. Though I don't think any of us ever had the price of a hundredweight, Mrs. Kyle would heave large sacks of coal up four flights of stairs while her son stood below in the street with Neddy, the horse and cart.

When the son got married, we were introduced nightly to the saga of what happened between himself and his wife. Apparently they didn't agree, and he would give a round by round account of it all and the mother would say in a gruff bass voice: "God forgive you, son. You were very foolish to marry her," and the son would reply, "I didn't know, Mammy. I was innocent."

Before we knew it we had arrived.

I suppose nobody goes to Manchester with greater reluctance than the intellectual native of that city, and Stephen got off the train like a man going to be shot.

The morning was cold, but bright, and the sun shone through the smoky buildings with a fair heart. I was in fair heart too and did not notice the two men until they were upon me, but I could see by the looks of them that they had not come to inquire if I'd had a good trip to London. The young one, with a bloody big bull's head on him, grabbed me by the arm, while the older one searched me. From an inside pocket he took the airman's identity card and service paybook and Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I was disgusted with myself for giving it so easy to these coppers. By now they had me gripped by both arms.

"We have reason to believe that you are Brendan Behan," said the older man, who was obviously in charge of the proceedings, "and we are taking you into custody, charged with unlawfully returning to this country and being in possession of false documents."

If the bastards had offered me the Victoria Cross along with the King of England's blessing, I could not have been more surprised, and my thinking in my own mind that the only exercise I would be getting for a long time would be at night in the kip and a stretch in front of me for helping a man escape. Maybe this was to come when I got down to the station. I was bundled into the wireless patrol car and taken to the lock-up where I was formally charged by the station sergeant. There was no sign nor mention of Dick Timmons. Later on I was to learn that William Scurrie had brought Dick to Galway on the *S.S. Monalene*, so he was free and I was not.

I was shoved in the cell for the night by an ignorant class of animal who took my shoes and my braces as had been done at Lime Street, in Liverpool, in 1939. The following morning, when I heard the doors above being

opened, I knew they were going to court, and I could hear some of the other prisoners shouting to each other and the Black Maria backing into the yard. I went to the spy-hole as the turnkey unlocked the cell door. He did not say anything but nodded to me for to follow him. I thought it best to say nothing either but let the hare sit.

At the court, the Chief Detective Inspector read the charges against me.

"Brendan Behan," he growled, "is stated to have been expelled from England under the Prevention of Violence Act (1939) and has entered the country illegally and is in possession of false documents. In view of the provisions of this Act, I shall have to communicate with the Secretary of State."

I was remanded for a week and the magistrate asked me if I had anything to say. I told him that, while I admitted having been served with a deportation order, I failed to see why my case could not be dealt with immediately. He was not unfriendly and smiled at me when he explained that, owing to the seriousness of the case, this was not possible. I could see the sense of this too, as I got rightly out of the court, for my people at home would know where I was, and would see that I was not done in.

Back in the cell, the day was beginning to get gloomy with the light fading from the sky, and I heard steps on the stairs. The turnkey opened the door and brought me up the passageway.

"Someone wants to see you," said he.

Maybe they were going just to send me home after all, and God knows I would go and stop away and be thankful. I kept up with him and was shown into the Governor's office. I stood to attention, said my name and number and all to that effect when he puts up his hand and stops me.

"How well do you know the Pope, Behan?" he said as he handed me a telegram which read: "I'm flying to defend you. The Pope."

I gulped a few times and nearly burst my arse from laughing but stuffed it back and kept my face straight.

"I know him fairly well," I said, which was the truth, though not His Holiness Himself. I have a friend, Eoin O'Mahoney, a Cork barrister, whom we called the Pope, and he must have read of my case in the newspapers.

"I don't believe you," said the Governor in a stern voice.

"I don't care whether you do or you don't," says I, "but you can read for yourself that the Pope is coming over to help me."

At Manchester Assizes the following week, the Pope O'Mahoney did defend me, and he defended me so excellently that I got away with four months, having been sentenced by Wesley Orr, a collateral descendant of the first man to die for the Irish Republic.

# TWELVE

I WAS TAKEN under the court to the cells, which are not solid wood and steel like prison cells but open bars with gates chain-manacled to the bars. And I could see the other prisoners waiting to go up to Manchester Jail or Strangeways Jail; it's all the same, whatever way you look at it. I think that Strangeways is a very good name for a prison, unlike the other ones I mentioned.

With our lot were about twenty men whose ages ranged from seventeen to fifty. It was the most pathetic sight I've ever seen in my life, for they were all wearing their Sunday best and they were obviously bemused by the fact that they were going to prison. They just stood there, very downcast.

I turned to another prisoner, a Yorkshire kid who was an ex-soldier of the Eighth Army: "Look at those poor bastards," I said.

"Don't you know about them?"

"No," I said and I looked at him as earnestly as I could, wondering if I had picked a craw-thumper who had been used to gazing over wide open spaces from the gate to the hanghouse. But he only said, quietly, that they were coal miners who had been caught screwing each other down the pit.

And I remembered George Orwell's story of the mines

and how sometimes the miners worked in shorts and sometimes they worked with nothing on at all. Mother of Christ, I put it to myself, how they stand it in the pits, I do not know.

Now I have heard of very many depressing human situations, but the idea of having sex of any kind down a coal mine seems to me to be about the most depressing human situation that you could possibly find. And these men were highly respectable; they had worked hard all their lives and now they were exposed between the devil and the deep sea because they would meet the same temptations all over again in the nick. Now I don't know who should be in prison, but sometimes I think the people who dish out the sentence should try their luck in them.

I felt sorry for these men.

"Look," I said to one of them, "nothing that you have done, except that you interfere with a little child, is shameful. I'm here because I am a member of the Irish Republican Army and I'm obviously an enemy of the British Empire, but I have been over it before and I'm going to get over it again."

"Paddy," he said, "that may be all right for you, but you don't know my old woman."

In the afternoon we were brought up to the day-room where we had our possessions marked off, and we fell into line ready for the Black Maria. The noise of the traffic as we passed through the city made me sad, and as it is impossible to see out of these prisons on wheels I stared at the floor, not giving a fugh one way or another.

Sitting opposite me in the Black Maria was a red-haired youth who had been charged with obtaining money by means of a trick. He thought he was getting his own back on the Egyptians but it turned out that they were the West Kents, and he got weighed off with six months. The policeman with us was friendly and attentive, cocking his head and nodding according to the conversation, though never a one spoke to him. When the Black Maria

pulled up, he told us to get out and stand in line with no more talking.

The big main door of the prison had the same snake in chains over it as I had seen at Walton Jail. A warder came out to meet us and we were marched single file inside. The door banged out behind us. The four-month stretch had begun.

Mostly all of the fellows who were with me were Englishmen of roughly my own age, although there were one or two older lads. I had just had my twenty-fourth birthday, which to me, now, seems to be very young, though I didn't think so at the time. But these fellows were supposed to be the tough guys of the Eighth Army in the Desert Rats, and they were in for shooting their officers and, by the looks of them, I'd say they could have shot a few more.

For myself, I could say that I never met more decent chaps in my life. They were extremely good, honorable men, and, further than that, I would say that they were very good Englishmen. Some of them had fought for two and for three years against the Germans and the Italians in the desert and had had pretty rough times. When young bastards of eighteen and nineteen arrived over from Sandhurst in the middle of a campaign and proceeded to use the cane on these veterans, or in one way or another generally fugh them about, the hardy desert fellows turned round and plugged some of them. And knowing a few IRA officers, I must say that I do not blame them. But these young British officers were brave enough so far as I could hear about them, but thick and ignorant where the men were concerned.

At one time the whole of Ireland was in arms against England and the sympathy of the world behind her, but in Strangeways Jail my whole sympathy was for these poor bastards who were even ill-treated by the warders. I was contented enough, however, and experience of prison had made me more independent of the screws.

Until this day when I could not eat all my scoff at

lunch. I was sitting next to a young Yorkshireman whom we called John the Baptist on account of his love for telling stories from the New Testament. He had fought with the Eighth Army at Tobruk and at Bengasi and had had the misfortune of falling across an officer who didn't like him.

It was the usual lunch of bully beef, two soggy potatoes and cabbage, but I was not able for it and I handed my plate to Johnny. Our warder, the stocky frog-faced turkey-toed bastard, known as the Iron Man—though he was not very iron out at the front by the sound of things—snatched the plate out of my hand and flung the food in a dustbin.

I collected my breath to speak without stammering. "I don't know if that sort of treatment is provided for in the regulations, but I would have thought you might have more respect for someone who has defended England and the likes of you at a most perilous hour in action against the Germans."

There, it was done and as I search his face steadily, keeping the anxiety out of my own, I knew, relieved, that he was shaken. All the men behind him were grinning and delighted.

"I'll regulate you, Guy Fawkes," he snarled. "I don't notice any of your bastarding IRA men doing anything except to blow up new battleships and to kill innocent people who have never done you a day's harm."

I did not object to this manner of speaking for to a certain extent I deserved it. I didn't like it, but at the same time, I was an Irishman and a member of the IRA. As Reginald Dunne, a British ex-serviceman of the First World War, remarked when he was in prison for the assassination of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff: "We didn't think they were going to give us a cup of tea up at Brixton."

I did not expect, however, this to be England's thanks to her bravest soldiers, the Desert Rats. I thought at the time to ill-treat and insult these men was pretty disgust-

ing and I still think so. How and ever, I do not expect very much thanks myself from Ireland, but this is a different story. This is the thanks that a soldier gets and I'm afraid this is the thanks that a soldier deserves.

I could not complain of my treatment. The screws in Strangeways were getting more used to me and the prisoners who had not fought in any war were easy in their mind that if they got it up for me too much, I'd make a ballocks of them. They were afraid of me and we'll keep it so, I said in my own mind.

Some of the boys who'd been brought in were serving life sentences for rape, and perhaps some of them are in yet. It was alleged that they had committed offenses against the Germans. Now I do not approve of rape but on the other hand I do not approve of taking boys from their homes, sticking them in a foreign environment and encouraging them to commit all sorts of atrocities, including killing, against the Germans in 1945, and then all of a sudden in 1946 expecting these same men to behave like little angels. The unfortunate youths did not ask to be sent to the front and I think the British Government should have given them a fair shake. They could have been given a few months inside, or a year even, but that's all under the circumstances. But in the postwar period, the War Office dealt very severely with their own soldiers.

Now I am not concerned with the honor of the British Army either during the war or after the war, but it struck me that most of the boys I met in jail, who were on rape charges in Germany and other occupied areas, were not there as a result of anything else except British Government policy.

The men were not rapists, because they were not rapists by nature. I knew them and spoke to them and I would say drank with them except that we didn't have anything to drink. In my opinion they were not rapists nor sex maniacs, but had simply been with girls who, with a very few exceptions, had reported them to the

authorities under a species of blackmail. To the eternal discredit of the British War Office, these kids were railroaded. I would say it was pathetic, except that they were brave soldiers and there is nothing pathetic about bravery. However, they were regarded as worse than murderers and it was the best of my play to keep easy and say nothing.

I met one of these postwar heroes one time in the baths. He was on remand, waiting to go to court, and was literally shaking with fright. I stood up in the cubicle to soap my legs and I looked over the half door and saw him. He smiled at me and seemed glad for a few minutes' chat, so I told him he must be fughing mad to stand there shivering, because, at first, I thought it was on account of the cold.

"I'm on a charge for raping a girl in Germany," he said, seriously.

"How old, kid?"

"Well, I thought she was eighteen, but it turns out she was only sixteen," and he began putting his underpants and his vest on as he spoke.

I smiled into his serious eyes and, being something of a stir liar, asked him if he had raped her all the same.

"No," he whispered, shaking his head.

"Straight up?"

"Straight up."

"Listen," said I, "don't go letting them put the wind up you in court. You keep your pecker up and stick to your story and tell the bastards that the girl just fell for you."

Which is obviously what happened, because I know of very few people who believe that there is such a thing as rape, except in the case of a number of men or youths attacking a girl all together.

This unfortunate individual hadn't raped anybody. He was simply being used by the British Government, who wanted to make an example of somebody and who felt that the German regime had to be placated. That

was about the height of it. I only ever knew one man in Strangeways whom I did think was guilty of this sort of behavior. He had interfered with a little girl and none of us spoke to him. We neither walked with him nor talked with him.

The screws at Borstal were a different breed altogether from the screws at Strangeways, but the ways of the Lord being what they are, we did some very unfair things to them and used to give them the rub because they had done no active fighting except against the Indians at the Fakir of Ipi or some such place like that. The reason for this, of course, was that most of them had joined the army in 1919 after the First World War and their twenty years' service was up before the beginning of the 1939 war.

I gained a certain knowledge of wrestling from one of these men at Borstal who was in charge of the garden party. His name was Sullivan and he had red hair, narrow eyes with a slight squint and a face with the look of a boxer. He was extremely proud to have been a member of the East Lancs regiment and was stationed for many years at Fulwood Barracks, their headquarters, in Preston.

One of the boys on the party had been in the same regiment and had known, if not that particular provoke sergeant, at least another one very like, and when they got into conversation the rest of us listened with attention with the hope that it would extend our break beyond the allotted ten minutes. Sullivan was a black sash man at the judo, which meant that he knew a very great deal about wrestling, too, and in a pronounced Lancashire accent he talked about that, when he was done with the provoke sergeant for a while. When we were working in the fields, we sometimes used to coax him into showing us tricks, which he could not resist doing because he was a natural teacher.

"I heard, sir," I said, "there was a grip you could use, even against a fellow armed with a knife."

"Or a gun, Paddy," he said grimly. "But it is against the rules for a screw to be showing a prisoner his tricks. Makes him as good as himself." And he smiled with his narrowed eyes as he began showing us all the same.

Ah, Jasus, he was a good old skin. The only time he ever reproved me was for using bad language, on the grounds that his father came from Mayo and his mother was a Sligo woman and they were both good Catholics and that I shouldn't lower myself to using bad language, of which I am extremely fond. In my very early childhood I never used bad language because I didn't hear it in my home, except when my father had a few oils on him, and that was only at weekends.

During the earlier part of the week my old man would read us Dickens and Shaw and Charles Lever, who wrote *Charles O'Malley* and who was Shaw's first model in writing. They were great gatherings and I sitting at his feet round a big fire, taking it all in. The preface in *John Bull's Other Island* I knew almost by heart, but happily I forgot everything he read from *Marcus Aurelius*, which put years on me.

Our big fireplace in the kitchen had been there from the time of the gentry, as they are called, who had left Ireland in 1800 after the abolition of the Irish Parliament by the Act of Union. The abolition of the Irish Parliament was a big loss to us because the colonial parliament would have evolved, in the course of time, into a national parliament, without war and without the insolent business of killing people. We would not have had a famine and we would have had our own government, in so far as we wanted it, with a customs' union, not of law but of fact, with the rest of the British Isles, of which, I make this confession, we are a component part.

If I learned about wrestling from Provoke Sergeant Sullivan in Borstal, I learned in Strangeways, from the

men who fought alongside them, that the London regiments didn't get much credit for their bravery during the war. Apparently the Londoner, or the cockney, was expected to fight and to fight well and had to go first up the line whether he liked it or not. On the other hand, the British Government seemed to think that they had to coax, not only the Irish, the Welsh and the Scots, but the men from the North of England as well. I can only repeat a famous remark made by one German general to another in the First World War.

"The British Army fight like lions," said the first general.

"Yes," said the other one, "but they are led by donkeys."

Now sometimes I like to argue about politics and to savage the boss class and their peasant supporters, but I must give one of these donkeys a fair shake. He founded the British Legion, who gave me a bed one time. My brother, who had been in the Royal Air Force during the war, went to them and asked if he could have a bed for himself.

"Yes," they said, "but we know why you want it. You want it for your brother who is shortly out of prison. He's an IRA man. But we'll give him a bed."

And I slept there and never a word was said about it.

They say that people take to hard work as easily as to drink, but I've never found it so. I'm inclined to have a contemptuous attitude to work of any description, but I did not like the treatment some of the blokes got in Strangeways and a trade would have kept my mind off it. And Satan will find work for idle hands. John Howard, the Quaker, must have had terrible little to do when he invented solitary confinement. I think there was more, what we call in Irish "*Uaigneas gan ciuneas*," loneliness without peace, in this jail than I ever experienced anywhere else.

Until this day, July 22, 1947. It was the kind of day

that you'd know Christ died for you and to hell with the devil. All loneliness was forgotten and there was great agreeing going on among ourselves, we were so grateful and holy for the sunshine.

The little Yorkshire orderly told me. He had only been in the place for two or three days so I didn't know his name even.

"You're going out this evening, Paddy. Remission for good conduct and all that."

And so it was that I came to be driven along the East Lancs road to Liverpool on a fine summer's evening and once again placed aboard a ship about to leave Great Britain. Deported and not for the first time, nor, I am afraid, for the last.

"If you wish to make representations to the Secretary of State for Home Affairs against your expulsion, do so or forever hold your peace."

I held my peace. I thought this was the least I could do.

# THIRTEEN

NEVER BEING one to remain in concealment, I went through immigration, down the gangway and straight to a pub in Grafton Street. I decided to walk there as the bit of air would do me good, for when I was able, walking was a pastime of which I was extremely fond. Besides, on this day I was half doped from the sun, and when I reached Grafton Street, the pavements were like the top of an oven and I was glad for the high stool in the pub for the safety of the soles of my feet.

There are some pubs where it's all widows. Young widows, old widows, thin widows, fat widows, rich widows and poor widows. They sit talking about their late husbands all night until they start crying over them. It would put years on you. But this pub was largely inhabited by intellectuals of a sort and people who had been in the IRA during the war and British and American servicemen who were now at Trinity College, Dublin, the Americans on the GI bill.

When I was sitting down having a smoke, a man came over and introduced himself. He was an American from Michigan called Lester Jeus, formerly of the United States Navy but now he was on the GI bill at Trinity College. He spoke not like an American at all, but in the most beautiful English, using Cromwellian swearwords like, "by the bowels of Christ."

Not that I have any great affection for the memory of Cromwell, who, as is popularly known, is not one of our national heroes. I didn't mind his cutting off the king's noggin, because that just showed that a king's head can come off like anybody else's. But his actions in Drogheda and Wexford were those of a Heydrich and a Himmler combined. In the town of Wexford he massacred 300 women, grouped round the Cross of the Redeemer, and delighted his soldiers with the slow process of individual murder, stabbing one after another. When his soldiers were running their pikes through little babies, in between psalms they would shout, "Kill the nits and there will be no lice!"

The genuine revolutionaries in Cromwell's army were left behind in remote parts of Ireland so that they could start a revolt against the landlords back in England. Ironically, their descendants speak the Irish language in one of its last strongholds, the Aran Islands, off the west coast of Ireland, but according to Liam O'Flaherty, the internationally famous writer and a native himself of the Aran Islands, they speak Irish to this day with a cockney accent. They have names like Perkins and Piggott, gaelicized to O Peircin and O Pigoid, and visitors are surprised that so few of the inhabitants are dark-haired. I am bound to admit that most of them are blonds, with English roses rather than Irish *cailins* predominating among the girls.

However, nothing alters the fact that these Cromwellian expressions sounded exotically elegant from the North American mouth of Lester Jeus. Although he said he was twenty-seven, he wasn't much taller than I and certainly much lighter. This surprised me as I always imagined anyone in the United States Navy as being of stalwart build. His name seemed to be an embarrassment to him.

"I have often received letters addressed to me as 'Lester Jesus,'" he said. "In fact, once the Dublin General Post Office refused a telegram for me on the grounds that it was blasphemous."

We were interrupted by a hungry-faced man with puffed eyes, Edwin Lang, formerly of the Royal Canadian Seaforth Highlanders and the brother-in-law of Lester Jeus.

"You mean," I said, "that your sister is married to Jesus," which I considered a legitimate piece of blasphemy, and we laughed together.

This talent for blasphemy I inherited from my father. A jolly and placid man in the home, he would have to put up with great histrionics from my mother when she'd be in a passion, for her side of the family had been in the theater for generations and she was not slow to get in on the act. There was this Saturday when he came in pretty drunk and she started in at him, shouted the odds and comparing him to Felming, a shop assistant who had killed his wife with a blow of a hammer and then tried to blame it on an insurance collector. And he had killed her because he had a young girl in the family way with whom he could not go away while his lawful wife lived. He was a daily Mass goer and communicant and all to that effect, and a member, nay president, of the Saint Patrick's Anti-Communist League.

"Sacred Heart of Jesus," my mother screeched. "You are worse than Fleming. He killed his wife decent, like a humane killer with one blow of the hammer, but you are slowly scourging me to an early grave."

My father wearily took a newspaper out of his pocket and pretended to read it, holding it up in front of himself as a bit of soundproofing. My mother lost her patience, or what was left of it, and screeched some more.

"Have you nothing to say for yourself? Can you not answer me?" and she shoved a pot through the paper as she spoke.

My father had to say something now, in case worse would befall, so he said, by way of no harm: "Kathleen, if Jesus Christ was married to you, in two weeks he would be back up on His comfortable fughing Cross."

Lester had met his wife, Jessica, during the war when

she was in the ATS and they were both posted to England. They were both extremely proficient in the Morse code, and for some time they sent highly secret Government messages to each other across the telegraph wires of Great Britain. One day, in an idle moment, Lester tapped out a message to his correspondent in the headquarters of a British war citadel, somewhere in England: "Are you a guy or a girl?"

Jessica tapped back: "I am a girl."

"Would you like to meet me for a drink?"

The tapping continued furiously. "Sure. I feel we have known each other for years."

Jessica was seventeen at the time and Lester nineteen and they duly met and got married. The first night of their union was spent in the police station at Northampton because they had been arrested for being in a condition of as much drunkenness as was possible to make in England during the war years. But the police were very kind and understanding and allowed them to spend the honeymoon night together in the same cell.

Strange to say, the annuity Jessica received from the British Government was larger than the grant that her husband got from the American Government, a fact which was a great bone of contention between them.

She joined us now. "How did your first night of marriage go in the police station?" I asked her.

"It was all right, but my arse sure hurt me because we were sleeping on a wooden bench," she answered civilly enough, though I could see she was in a bad temper. She tapped something on the counter to Lester and he tapped back. Their facility with the Morse code was something they obviously had not lost on their emergence from the American or from the British forces. I knew they were having a row, and there was a rugged-looking individual standing at the other end of the counter who seemed to understand perfectly both the Morse code and what they were tapping. He blenched visibly. I would have said blanched, but he didn't blanch,

he blenched. I went moseying over to him, for if you don't get up and ask you'd hear nothing, and I didn't want to be out of the fashion.

"Who are those friends of yours?" he asked.

"The divil looks after its own. They are husband and wife."

"Well, they can certainly use filthier language in Morse than I have ever heard in my life before," he said, reddening at the gills.

"Come, sir. What could they have said to cause you such distress, annoyance and embarrassment?" For cute sliveen that I am, I was determined to find out.

"The girl tapped out that her aunt was coming down from Belfast that day and she would like her husband to come home, whereupon the gentleman replied: 'Screw your aunty and I'll tell you more if you care to listen.' The girl said, 'How dare you say screw my aunty, you American pig,' and the man replied, 'You Canadian bitch, where would you be only for us?' "

I pretended to look shocked, but I shrugged my shoulders. "You know, sir, the way it happens," I said. "Compliments pass when the quality meet."

However, the next remark tapped between the two of them must have been so disgusting that my translator dropped his glass and walked straight out of the pub.

I went down to have a piss and to think of the times we were in and the quarrelings, both in peace and war, of men with men, men with women and women with women. When I returned to the bar, there was another man in our group. He was an Englishman, late of the Royal Navy, called John Fraser. He had flaming red hair, which I noticed finished on the smoothness of his neck. He had met Lester Jeus in a pub in London during the war and they had become friendly in rather a strange way. They were both in uniform and in the course of a conversation comparing their respective navies, Jeus told Fraser that the United States Navy dismissed King

Lears, officially known as homosexuals, the minute they caught them on.

"Although I am already married," he said, "I would not have any scruples about trying this dodge on myself, only I am saving it up for D-Day in case they send me toward the continent. I have no intention of leaving my present job as a telegraphist in the London office of the American Navy, that's for sure."

John Fraser nodded approvingly with a best-of-British-luck grin on his face, and then fell to thinking himself. He was on destroyers at the time, which were highly dangerous, not to say uncomfortable if you were eating your dinner and the ship took a sharp lurch one way or another. He ordered another two pints of bitter, a drink I particularly detest, but a drink for all that.

"I wonder whether our lot would wear that lark?" he mused.

"It's worth trying," answered Jeus. "It's bad enough to be in this bloody war, without having to spend it on destoyers."

"Try it, I will," says John Fraser. "I've to be back on board by eleven o'clock tonight, so I'll be off now."

Jeus called out to him to let him know how he made out.

"Right, mate. See you here tomorrow night around eight o'clock," answered Fraser.

The meeting with the captain took place early the following morning.

"I have a confession to make to you, sir," says John Fraser.

"Really, old boy," said the captain, tugging at his beard, "how interesting." And then after a pause, "Push on, old man. What is it?"

"Well, sir, I find myself sexually attracted to my oppo."

"Indeed," said the captain sternly. "And whom might he be?"

"He is 350166 Smith, able-bodied seaman, sir."

"There are so many Smiths, Fraser. Would you describe him to me and tell me what his function is on my ship?"

So Fraser gave a loving account of 350166 Smith, able-bodied seaman, whose guts he hated, more especially because the bastard snored like a pig all night and he could hardly ever get a wink of sleep.

"Ah, yes, I know who you mean," said the skipper when the description was over. "Pretty nice-looking lad. I couldn't blame you for fancying him, but you know how it is. The course of true love never runs smooth. Try and concentrate on your work a bit more."

He stood up and, with a gesture of the hand dismissing Fraser, he said, "Good luck, my boy."

"Mean old fugh-pig," Fraser called him as he told the story to me and we all nearly burst laughing, but stuffed our laughter back for he was serious with it.

"You're a funny sod and no mistake," I said to Fraser.

Said Edwin Lang, "He's an Englishman *and* a foreigner."

I nodded my head, but before Edwin Lang could say anything else I said, "Well, everyone is a foreigner out of his own place."

Him being a Canadian, that shut *his* bloody mouth on the matter.

John Fraser had just returned from the Isle of Man where he and his sister had been placing their dead father so they wouldn't have to pay death duties. The old man was the proprietor of a very large woolen mill in Yorkshire, and when they found that he was failing in his health, they brought him across to the Isle of Man in an airplane.

"When we got there," said John, "the old bastard was as stiff as a board. He had failed us on the way out, in spite of the fact that we gave him champagne and Guinness."

"What a waste," Jeus said, taking a drag of his cigarette. I smiled at Jessica and Jessica smiled back, but Ed-

win Lang only nodded as he was still needled with me over my last remark to him.

"Ah," said Fraser, "all was not lost. When we discovered that the old fellow was quite stiff, we pretended he was drunk and assisted him off the airplane and into a taxi. The taxi driver was a decent chap and he helped us stick my father into the back seat. 'Now father, bear up. You'll be all right in a minute. Come along now,' I said to him and the man was as dead as a doornail the whole time. We had rented a house on the island and we carried him, all that was left of him, up to his room and we had a Manx doctor certify that he had died fifteen minutes after his arrival in the Isle of Man."

And with that Anglo-Saxon chivalry of which he was ever the master, he explained that his father had died in a good cause. He had saved them about thirty thousand pounds.

With that piece of information, Gabriel MacCarthy, an ex-IRA friend of mine who had by now joined us, suggested that we might see some of the thirty thousand pounds that he had saved. "Set them up, John," he said.

"Okay," said Fraser, though his hand trembled at the thought of it as he reached out on the counter for a tumbler to grip.

"Come on then, before your thoughts go from the straying," said Gabriel.

The order was given and taken and a young poet sitting at the other end of the counter called out that he would have a drain of the other as well. When the drinks were set up, there was no glass of whiskey for the poet.

"The trouble with that fellow," said the poet, looking at the barman, "is that he hates me because I am Irish."

We had begun the morning on the totally false declaration that we were only going to drink Guinness, but after a while we all started to drink whiskey. John Gough came into the bar. He was an Englishman who had been in the Fleet Air Arm, but he had only been in it after the war, and even to the Irish Republican Army this did not

constitute effective service and he was not entitled to a Government grant. As a result he was not so much respected in our company, but it wasn't the poor bastard's fault because he was too young to have been in the war. He was not in the "farewell-to-arms" lark like the rest of us, because he had no arms to say farewell to.

Myself and MacCarthy had both got money from the Clan na Gael, the Irish Republican organization in America, on our emergence from durance vile, and the rest of the boys in the pub that day were living off the British Army or the American Army or other sorts and sizes of armies. We despised him because we considered any self-respecting man fit for our company should be getting a pension for something or should be getting some kind of an allowance or an educational grant. He certainly should be on some fiddle. Also he was living on his own money and supported not only himself and a wife, but also a large moustache, which looked quite ridiculous. The only good thing to be said about him was that he spoke with a very healthy Yorkshire accent which he never tried to disguise. As a matter of fact, I think he somewhat accentuated it since he came to live in Ireland.

Gough tolerated me largely because I had a brother in the Royal Air Force who received a pension for war service and who had been invalided out, and he tolerated Gabriel MacCarthy for the simple reason that he was a friend of mine.

But Gabriel, at the best of times, particularly when he had a drink in him, was violently anti-English. He detested Gough and he was not a man to hide his detestation.

"Hello there, Gough," he said.

John Gough answered, "Hello, MacCarthy," affecting the attitude of a bluff officer of the old school tie. His pretty little blond wife, Gloria, was with him and Gough politely pulled up a stool for her to sit beside him.

"You'll sit over here beside me," Gabriel snarled at her.

Gloria took it in good part and only pretended to go

for him. "Don't speak like that," she said. "I'll sit between the pair of you."

"In that case," said I, with that courteous wit of which I was ever the master, "you will be like Jesus Christ between the two thieves."

I thought Gabriel would do his nut, but I was wrong for he was very much improved in his humors.

"Give us a rebel song there, for Jasus' sake," he said to me.

I looked up at the large notice board reading, "No singing," and began sobbing with emotion, "September Song."

"Not that fughing song," interrupted Gabriel, so I struck up "Home on the Range."

"Go it, Brendan," said Gloria. "I like that song."

"Doing a great business," said the publican. "Nice place, isn't it? Next year I am going to start a beer garden in the back."

Gough said stuffily: "It strikes me you have a beer garden already in the front."

"They are bloody American songs and I don't want to hear any of them," said Gabriel. I had forgotten that he hated the Americans at the present time because he thought they were too pro-British. "I suppose you will be singing 'God Save the King' next," he said spitefully.

"Ah," I said, "I don't know. I've a certain admiration for the old skin. He took up speaking as a doctrinaire Republican. He took up a job that he didn't want and he carried it through very courageously."

"Good on you, Brendan, lad," said Gough, and Edwin Lang smiled out his approval.

Gabriel's wattles flamed in anger. "If you won't sing a fughing rebel song, then I will." He struck up:

*"In Dublin town they murdered them.*
*Like dogs they shot them down,*
*God's curse be on you, England now,*
*God strike you, London town.*

*"And cursed be every Irishman,*
*Alive or yet to live,*
*Who'll e're forget the deaths they died,*
*Who'll ever dare forgive."*

The song finished and by way of no harm, he shouted, "Up the Republic! We defy you," straight in the face of John Gough, "and to hell with the British Empire!" And his face was as pink as a baby's from passion and drink.

With the help of the Holy Mother of God, he'll carry on his plan of campaign by himself, all honor to him, of course, if only he leaves me out of it, I said to myself. I was enjoying the day, but by the looks of the publican I wouldn't be enjoying it very much longer. I was just wondering what to do when Gough spoke.

"I don't like that song, you know, nor the remarks that followed."

"I don't give a fish's tit whether you do or you don't," said Gabriel, "and there's an end on it."

Edwin Lang said, "Give the man a fair shake. I didn't like it a lot either."

"By the bowels of Christ," said Jeus, "I cannot see what you are all getting so excited about. It's a song just like any other song."

I was thinking about Jeus and what a hard man he was to please, because although he was dead against the IRA, he was also against the British upper class and the Royal Family, when I heard John Gough ask Gabriel why he had found such delight in getting it up for the English.

To tell the honest truth I could never understand the relationship between these two, and somehow I wondered if Gough was not pushing his luck by fostering this hatred, for although Gabriel was a short, squat fellow he was well able for the fists and to me looked exactly what he was: a little Irish tyke rather resembling myself in appearance. If you have ever seen a matchbox turned hori-

zontally and walking on two human legs, you will know what I mean.

But Gough was fooled by Gabriel's size and, like a great number of English and American people, had the idea that the fighting Irish are a tall race. This stems from the fact that most of the emigrants from Ireland are from the West, and they are huge-looking bastards, but they couldn't fight their way out of a paper sack. At my best days I could take on two of them because they will always give warning beforehand that they are about to fight. "Did you do this, bejasus?" or "Did you do that, bejasus?" and, if I was merciful enough, while they were shouting the odds I would give them a right cross-counter. Sometimes, I am afraid to admit, I gave them what was called in my old school, Borstal, the "Bowery Belt."

Anyway, Gabriel MacCarthy and John Gough seemed to play on the Anglo-Irish conflict again now, and as I was out for a bit of hooley, I was wearying of the whole business. So I asked the publican to set up another round and another, until MacCarthy and Gough lost their bad humor in the merriment that followed.

# FOURTEEN

I THINK it was Jeus who actually mentioned giving a party for me, though all the others were for the idea as well. I had been given a great welcome home, and by this time none of us were very much interested in politics and had more or less forgotten the war aims of the various organizations we had been in.

Besides, up to this the Dublin intelligentsia were very friendly disposed toward me because I had published very little, and for a garrulous man one of the very few things I don't talk about is my own writing. I started writing for Irish Republican and Irish left wing papers and was published first in a magazine called *Fiamnd*, the organ of Fianna Éireann, the Republican scout organization founded by Countess Markievicz, of which I was a member from the age of seven until fourteen, when I was transferred to the IRA as a courier or messenger boy.

I was very much incensed by the Spanish Civil War, in which many of my friends took part on the Republican side. The Irish who fought for Franco appeared to achieve the remarkable military feat of coming home with more men than they went out with. The Irish on the Republican side formed part of the International Brigade and they fought well and valiantly to the extent that they lost eighty men killed, a great number wounded and many taken prisoner. Those of us who were fourteen

years of age were left with the women and children, and a humiliating place it was for tough chiselers like us. We were left collecting tinned milk and packets of cocoa and bags of flour for the Food Ship, and we were only consoled by street fights and stone-throwing.

*Sure, with money lent by Vickers*
*We can buy blue shirts and knickers;*
*Let the Barcelona Bolshies take a warning;*
*Though his feet are full of bunions,*
*Still he knows his Spanish onions,*
*And we're off to Salámanca in the morning.*

The British decided to adopt for themselves the name of the Oliver Cromwell Battalion, but the Irish, who would do most things for Spain, decided that this was one thing they would not do—fight under the name of Oliver Cromwell. I could have understood it better if they had refused to fight alongside the British at all. Their atrocities to the Irish were committed in far more recent times than those of Oliver Cromwell. All of us in Fianna Éireann had lost some relation or other during the Troubles, and my mother was only two years married to Jack Furlong, a '16 man. My own father was involved in the burning of the Custom House although, as he says himself, the only useful thing he did during the whole War of Independence in Ireland was to burn his own birth certificate. Nobody over the age of sixty-five is supposed to work either in England or Ireland, and my father, who is certainly over sixty-five, has worked in both places.

The Irish in the International Brigade always liked fighting alongside the Basques, because they had Catholic priests who would take the confessions of the wounded. But in that period there were also people who shot members of the Christian front, and I was accused of suffering from amnesia because I did not know about these things. Perhaps I suffer from amnesia still.

In 1936 I began writing articles for the *Irish Democrat*

about Spain and they are the only articles I have ever written that I was not paid for and enjoyed writing. Any writing I have done since I have done purely for money.

The first article I was ever paid for appeared in the June, 1942, issue of *The Bell*, which was edited at the time by Sean O'Faolain. It was called "For the Assizes," but published under the title, "I Became a Borstal Boy," and I got a couple of guineas for it.

Sean O'Faolain, with the late Minister for Defense in the Irish Republican Cabinet, Mrs. Cathal Brugha, also supplied me with a blue sports coat and a pair of flannels; but by this time I was in Mountjoy Jail at the beginning of a fourteen-year stretch. When I came out four years later, I wrote silently, starkly, as my mother did not approve of my literary efforts.

"God preserve me from geniuses," she would say.

I sent a short story to Cyril Connolly, who was editor of *Horizon*, and I consider his reply very civil: "I'm afraid we cannot use this, not even in *Horizon*." But he also sent me a check.

So on this July day, 1947, there was no cause for anyone to be jealous of me, and a party in my honor was suggested. When we came out into the street, it seemed years since the morning, with the sun scorching the pavements and the sky rosy and pink over the head of Howth as I came off the beat. It was a fine mild evening, though, and I could see already the mists rising off the city and knew tomorrow would be fine as well.

The party was held in the Catacombs, a flat in the basement of a large Georgian house in a Georgian square in Dublin. It was rented by a tall, willowy Englishman called Cecil, a very kindly person in his own way and a great favorite of my father and mother. The lady who owned the Catacombs was a painter and she let the flat to Cecil rent-free, apparently because he posed for her pictures. Years later I was to see some of them, and it was in this strange way, at the funeral of M. J. MacManus, the literary editor of the *Irish Press*.

Now M. J. MacManus had been an old comrade of mine who had been in the IRA, and he had asked me to write a column for his newspaper, which I did for a couple of years. I got barred off it sometimes because I had too much to say against the clergy and the politicians, for it is owned by the President of Ireland, Eamon de Valera. I understood that although he could not read the column himself because his sight was going, he used to have it read to him.

However, M. J. MacManus was a very kind man and a good friend to me. When he died, as Eamon de Valera's biographer and literary editor of the Government organ, his funeral was very widely attended. I was met at the church door by Benedict Kiely, the assistant literary editor of the *Irish Press* at the time, and a novelist and a good one.

"While you are in the church, Brendan," he said, "they will be watching you because you are supposed to be anticlerical. For Christ's sake try and behave yourself and don't give them any excuse for criticizing your behavior."

I nodded in agreement and thanked him for the warning, but when I looked round the church, I discovered that the Stations of the Cross had been painted by the lady who owned the Catacombs and that her model for Jesus Christ was Cecil. There he was in various "camp" attitudes, as they say in England. Cecil arrested by the Roman soldiers; Cecil cruelly scourged at the pillar; Cecil meeting the pious women; Cecil with his afflicted Mother; and last but not least, Cecil nailed to the Cross.

It was the last that got to me, for Cecil lay on the Cross rather like some handsome young Italian sunbathing. He reclined on the Cross, so to speak. I burst out laughing and Kiely jabbed me in the ribs. Quickly I bent my head, though my shoulders shook, and I had to pretend to be sobbing.

Cecil had a lodger in the Catacombs known as the Baron. He was a Dutchman, who had spent the war in

Ireland, though his family, who were very wealthy brewers, lived in Holland. I do not think they were very eager to have the Baron join them.

At one stage of the game Cecil noticed that an electric kettle was missing from the Catacombs and he suspected that the Baron had stolen it, so he told him that if the kettle wasn't returned there would be very serious consequences. In actual fact the Baron had not only stolen the kettle but he had pawned it, so he had to wait until he got his allowance from the family in Holland before he could reclaim it.

"Cecil," he said, "after days and nights of searching, I have found your kettle," and his face broke into a wide grin.

"You found the kettle," answered Cecil in the voice of an early Christian martyr, "because you stole it in the first place and then pawned it. I sentence you to two years washing up, otherwise I will get you deported," which was an empty threat as Cecil was pretty lucky not to be deported himself. But the poor old Baron, rather than be sent back to his native land, agreed to his sentence.

There was some sort of a party practically every night at the Catacombs. A crowd of people would assemble in the flat, each one bringing a bottle of gin, or whiskey, or a dozen of stout. There would be men having women, men having men and women having women. A fair field and no favor. It was all highly entertaining.

On this night of my party, a good time was had by all. I was busy getting the credit of my travels with a girl who lived on the first floor of the Georgian building that housed the Catacombs. She had been the wife of a very famous English artist and was in Czechoslovakia when the war started, where she was nearly occupied by both the German and the Red Army.

John Fraser was attacking Lester Jeus over the Negro problem and Edwin Lang was attacking Gabriel Mac-

Carthy over the power of Catholicism in Ireland. MacCarthy, in turn, was attacking John Gough for the crimes of the English in Ireland, India and the rest. By way of no harm, Cecil began to attack the Baron over the behavior of the Dutch in Indonesia. Everyone else was listening with wide-eyed astonishment and the unknown warrior at the Arc de Triomphe on the Champs-Élysées had nothing on the unsung heroes of the Catacombs this night.

By way of being a natural coward and not wishing to get it up for anyone, rich or rare, except the girl who wasn't having any, I joined in with three other blokes and a girl who were ignoring the drunken rows over politics. I could hear Gabriel swearing at Gough from a height and telling Fraser that the lowest ruffians in Ireland were the Protestants.

"I've never heard of a Protestant ruffian," I said by way of introducing myself, for all the Protestants I ever knew were rich people in Dublin. The girl smiled. Her name was Ruth and she was Jewish and her husband, sitting opposite, was Seamus McCafferty, a sculptor. The other bloke was Mickey Brennan and looked the sort of fellow who would go anywhere he could get his head in.

It was great gas, and I sat talking with them until two o'clock in the morning when the drink finished and then we retired to Mack's studio, which was a little distance out of the city, and where Mack said there was plenty more to drink. I left my aforesaid friends still arguing the toss, but in better humor now and occasionally striking out the stave of a song.

Mack's studio was in the loft of what had obviously been an eighteenth-century coach house, but in the coach house he kept sacks of plaster, casts and materials that he used for his statues. We went upstairs to the loft where there was another man, Ben Isaac, a Jewish painter. Man-sized glasses of whiskey were given us to send off the night in good order, and we talked far into the early morning on the rim of the light from the dawn. When

Mack and his wife and Ben Isaac left, I began discussing with Mickey, and him being a Northerner from Belfast, the lamentable fact that everyone, only the poor Irish, is allowed to have a difference beweeen North and South.

"Damn it," I said, "we can't open our mouths but the stranger has it made into the basis for a thesis on racial relations."

In France the miner from Pas-de-Calais, and the Norman farmer even, refer to their countrymen of the South as "*les nègres*," and all combine to heap the foulest abuse on Paris and its people. In Italy, the Milanese and the Calabrian speak what are nearly two different languages, and in England itself the Geordie from Newcastle-on-Tyne speaks a dialect incomprehensible to the cockney, who despises him. But nobody has set up a boundary commission to separate Cannes from Caen, nor has it been suggested that there should be frontier posts from the Severn to the Wash, with a border in Birmingham cutting the Bull Ring in half, with the Mitre one side and the Rose and Crown on the other.

We heard voices downstairs in the coach house, Ruth's low at first and then rising, with Ben's grating voice mixed in between times. Then we heard her crying. Mickey looked at me and I looked back at him. If he was going to say anything, he changed his mind and went on listening the more.

"It's all right, dear," Isaac said. "They hid the cup of Benjamin in your sack."

Said Mickey Brennan, up like a shot and rushing over to the door, "Jasus, that's some special Jewish drink, the cup of Benjamin, and they have hidden it downstairs in one of those sacks of plaster."

Yes, said I in my own mind, and you'll have your head in there, too, that's for sure. And he did. As soon as Ruth and Ben came back up to the loft, he slipped down and proceeded to up-end all the sacks full of plaster looking for this cup of Benjamin. Apparently he did not know that it was a Jewish metaphorical term for saying that

somebody was getting somebody else into trouble, and I wasn't in mind for telling him.

The following night Mack and Ruth asked if I would like to go to the French ballet with them. Now I have got very strong views about the ballet. I do not consider it an art form. I think it is nice to see the kids hopping round and so forth, but the significance of it is lost on me. Also, this night, the only seats we could get were up in the gallery and the wits were frightened out of me in the first place as I am very much afraid of heights.

In one ballet there were a lot of French youths dressed up as sailors, with little pom-poms on their hats. And their pants were so tight that I began to be concerned as to their physical well-being. When they began to dance, for a tender youth of my age, this was too much.

"Up sodomy," I shouted and, in honor of those poor fellows out there strangling themselves, I had to retire to the bar to give myself a rosiner.

Next morning I didn't feel so good, but in the summertime of life nothing lasts long and I was back at the Catacombs before the night was out. Now the reputation of that round the city of Dublin was not a very high one, and some old ones even paid us the compliment of suspecting that we took drugs there. But such was not the case. Once or twice an American student might have pinched some drug from a hospital, but whatever it was, it usually got drowned in the whiskey or the gin. The poor old drug addict really hadn't much of a chance.

Sometimes the Catacombs could be quite dangerous, though for a different reason. Cecil was not always sure whom he would be bringing in and some of the young criminals—I don't know as I would call them criminals any more than the rest of us, but they were criminals in civil crime—used to get tough after they had a few drinks on them. But they were very much in the wrong shop, for we were able for them.

Eventually Cecil gave up the flat and went to England where he ran a bar in Welwyn Garden City, and I used

to bring my mother and father down to see him and gave them lots of free drink. He was a good old skin but we have now lost touch with him.

There were two sort of official brothels in Dublin that I used to attend and neither for their official purpose. They were simply places that stayed open until three or four o'clock in the morning and where you could get the glass of malt beside.

Now it happened one time I was having a pint in the wee hours, and Sheila, always slim and light on her feet as a feather, was up on her feet from the corner of the room and next to me.

"Did you ever see one of these before?" she said, and I, thinking she was pulling up her clothes to show me, was going to say yes, when she pulls out from her pants a hundred-pound note. Actually I had never seen one before, but the more I looked at it, the more certain and easy I was in my own mind that it was a hundred-pound note, for not only was it written on it but there was the Custom House printed on the back.

Irish paper currency has on the back of each note pictures of the sculptures around the Dublin Custom House, which I understand represent the different rivers of Ireland. In each case the river on the reverse side of the note is represented by the venerable head of an ancient. On the ten-shilling note the ancient representing the River Blackwater is looking noncommittal. On the pound note, the head is the River Lee in Cork, and he's smiling just ever so little, while on the five-pound note is the River Liffey, and he is laughing himself sick, while on the fifty-pound note the head is the River Corrib in Galway and he is splitting his sides laughing. The hundred-pound note has the Custom House itself, alone, on the back.

"Yes, sure," I said confidentially, "that's a hundred-pound note."

"Is it real?" she said seriously.

"Of course it's real. Why shouldn't it be?"

"Somebody has stamped on it, 'not negotiable,' " and sure enough there it was.

"Oh," I said, "probably some shiner playing around with a child's printing set."

So she tells me I am a very intelligent man and all to that effect and asks me if I would ever change it for her? By a master stroke and real presence of mind, she agrees to my getting as much as I can for her in notes and a tenner for myself for the trouble. We arranged to meet the following night and like the hammers of hell I was out of the place and over to see a friend of mine who I knew had a banking account. So anxious I was not to be lost out on the transaction that I stayed with him all that night and was nearly driven out of my mind and above in the puzzle factory with the waiting.

In short order, we were first in the bank that morning for, as I told the man, it wasn't lucky to stand in a queue for money. The hundred-pound note was handed over the counter along with some other currency to be deposited and a check duly drawn for one hundred pounds. They were to be given in ones and fivers.

Outside on the pavement and the sun high in the heavens, "I'll give you seventy pounds," he said.

"You will in your arse," for my nerves hadn't gone from the straying without some reward. "Give me ninety pounds," I said, "and that's the cheapest ten pounds you'll ever know."

When I met Sheila, I gave her the seventy pounds and I needn't have worried about the tenner. She gave me that too. I would like to put on record that this is the only time in my life in which I have ever shown any acumen with regard to finance.

However, I first started making money out of brothels at a very early age for this reason. I came from a poor home. Not so poor however as some American or English homes in the sense that my father would read to us for the four nights of the week when he hadn't enough money for beer, and my mother would sing to us. But

poor enough that the first eight years of my life were spent in a back parlor.

In the front parlor, divided from us by folding doors, was a brothel. It wasn't much of a brothel, God knows, but the inhabitants enjoyed themselves, or seemed to. I think they did more drinking there than anything else; it was more a shebeen than a kip.

One of the girls, Winnie Flanagan from Sligo, used to come to the hall door in the morning just before we went to school, and we got to realize that this was her custom. She would stand with her client, who was usually a little Dublin bourgeois very anxious to get away from our district, which is not one of the best known socially in the city but is best known in the world of literature as Joyce's "Night Town," and she would ask him to send me across the road for a package of cigarettes.

The client would then fumble in his pocket and maybe come up with a half crown which he would give to me. When I returned with the snout and offered the guy the change, she would say: "Ah, give the kid the change. He ran the errand."

The only smart thing I did in this case was to make sure I was around for the taking.

# FIFTEEN

About this time my mother began harping again that I might go and look for a job. I got out of the house with a mutter about going down to the Union Hall.

And by way of no harm, I went down by Davy Byrnes's where the height of good humor prevailed. Lester Jeus was there, telling all and sundry that he was off to France with the mot and small son, and Edwin Lang was going with them.

I reflected, as I covered the distance home to collect my passport, that a trip to Paris would improve my health considerably.

Three hours later, as I tottered onto the B. and I. at the North Wall, Gabriel was on the gangplank to tell me that the others were already improving the day up at the bar. And we improved the day from Holyhead to London and back to Newhaven for the cross-channel boat to such good effect that as I handed the immigration officer my passport—albeit under the name of Francis Behan—I was able to point out to him that, as I was going and not coming, his proper title was Emigration Officer. The deportation order against me troubled me not at all. I went through the customs with my friends and took the opportunity of watching the white cliffs of England receding in the background as we tossed our way across the channel.

At Dieppe I dodged out under the boat train at the Gare Maritime, which is out in the street, and snaked over to a wine shop for some cheese and *vin rouge* and was back on the train before anyone knew I was gone. The shop was owned by a Limerickman who called it the BBC Wine Store. A few hours later, the Dieppe-Paris express, after a couple of dozen stops at intervening points, arrived at the Gare Saint Lazare.

We were told that there was a shortage of buses, the Germans having taken a great number of them with them on the retreat of 1944. Judging by the length of time it took us to bus our way to Saint-Germain-des-Prés, they couldn't have given any of them back yet. Though looking up at the destination board on the lamp-post, I felt I could forgive a lot to a vehicle that made regular journeys to places like Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the Louvre and the Pont du Carrousel.

We were all kipped in a small hotel at Saint-Germain-des-Prés on the Left Bank. This area is to the postwar intellectual, genius or phony, have it whatever way you like, what Montmartre was to the artist of Picasso's youth, before the first war and, as a refuge of sinners, has succeeded Montparnasse, stamping-ground of Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald in the twenties.

It gained notoriety as the headquarters of Jean-Paul Sartre, just after the Liberation. He had a flat on the corner of the Rue Bonaparte, and the adjoining licensed premises, the Deux Magots and the Café de Flore, became the twin cathedrals of existentialism, of which philosophy he is the high priest. As regards existentialism, Cecil ffrench Salkeld, my wife's father, defines it as teaching "that man is sentinel to the null."

And as good an excuse for robbing all round you as any other, as Monsieur Jean Genet has proved with great profit to himself. This man was a burglar for many years and also a poet. He was arrested many times for breaking and entering and each time refused to recognize the Court. Like Marlowe, who countered all objection to his

home production of the coin of the realm with the remark that he was as much entitled to mint money as the Queen of England, Monsieur Genet told the Court that he robbed as an existentialist, and had a conscientious objection to keeping his hands easy.

In a less civilized country, he would have been engaged in the production of mailbags, four stitches to the inch. But Sartre and a number of other writers demanded that they leave the boy alone. And he is now an honored French writer, a credit to his country and the proprietor of an estate in the country. He does not need to do any more work in the burglaring line and lives on the proceeds of his books. I had extracts of his autobiography read to me, some of which rose the hair on my head. And, as my mother once remarked, that which would shock Brendan Behan would turn thousands gray.

Oscar Wilde died in a hotel down the street from us, in the Rue d'Alsace, and tradition has it that it was a priest of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, who attended him on his death bed. Later I was to write a poem to him. Then there was the Bonapartist who would march along the Boulevard Saint-Germain each day in his long coat and cocked hat, sword ever at the ready to avenge the slightest insult to his Emperor. We subsequently discovered that he was a collaborator and he was put in jail.

The atmosphere in the Latin Quarter at this time was quite extraordinary. Nobody gave a fiddler's fugh for your connections, who you fought for or why you fought. All they wanted was a drink, a smoke and *that*, and were totally uninterested in any armies or arms. I was in the company of Samuel Beckett one evening and his cousin, a Jewish girl from Dublin. Samuel Beckett had been in the Resistance, and he introduced his cousin to a great many of his friends, both French and otherwise, who had also been in the Resistance. We started off in a bar at Montparnasse and wound up almost a day later somewhere around Pont Royal, and despite the many introductions, I had this little Jewish girl to myself

all the way, and for the following reason: Every time Sam introduced her to one of his compatriots, I would click my heels and she would hear the clicking and assume the innocent fellow was an ex-member of the SS and refuse to speak to him. Though in truth the poor bastard had probably spent four years in Ravensbruck or Belsen.

Nearby our hotel, in the Rue Dauphine, was the Studio Bar, where Jeus had his small son's CARE parcel delivered. Now CARE is an organization whereby Americans supply other Americans in Europe with food, and Jeus' parcel consisted of olive oil and an assortment of baby foods, mistakenly sent by his father for his little grandson. Jeus, however, would sell the parcel and usually got two thousand francs for it.

Also in the Rue Dauphine was old Raymond Duncan, who ran an Akademia of Greek culture, and often I watched him and his disciples, elderly ladies and gentlemen dressed in sandals and a sort of kilted costume that bore as much resemblance to the clothes of the ancient Greeks as the uniform of the Fintan Lalor Pipe Band to that of Brian Boru, march in solemn procession to greet the dawn at the bottom of our street. A little further up at Odeon Métro station was the Pergola Restaurant, frequently inhabited by an old Chinaman or something, who specialized in one branch of English literature, and that a bilingual catalogue from Messrs. Whiteleys of London. He would read it by the hour so that we might know how "three-piece Chesterfield suite, twenty pounds ten," or "Oak double bed, eleven pounds ten: mattress, best flock extra," sounded in Chinese. Jeus christened him God, whom he rather resembled. And we dared not move an inch till the last huckaback towel was disposed of, for he was a man of wide culture and, in addition to his literary talents, was a jujitsu expert.

We hadn't been in Paris very long and it being summer and you'd die from the lack of a breath of the sea, when Jeus and myself sat in the Studio Bar trying to cure

two hangovers with very little money. The patron man, by the name of Pierre Kharlamoff, was a decent man, but he could do nothing for us. The real governor of the place was in behind the counter checking the accounts. And the most our kind patron could do was to offer us two hundred francs to go up the street to the Pergola and get a little *pastis*.

But the cure was worse than the disease. Because I was expecting to meet members of the Irish National Pilgrimage of Repentance to Lourdes, and Jeus was expecting his small son's CARE parcel to be delivered, and this was the time for them both. The pilgrims were the cause of our hangovers this morning, for we were after having a tremendous bash the night before. As one of the repentant pilgrims put it, as soon as they reached Lourdes the repentance would really start, but in the meantime, they had to have something to be repentant about.

Jeus, after a half hour of waiting, looked glum about his son's CARE parcel, and I prayed more fervently and desperately that the steps of the repentant pilgrims might be directed toward the Studio Bar. But the depression got the better of us and we accepted the patron's loan and bought a bottle of Calvados with it.

A tall man came in, in the midst of our misery, and started walking up and down the floor alongside us. Twice or three times he looked over and smiled anxiously in our direction.

"God's teeth," muttered Jeus with some irritation, "could that fellow not go away?"

I suppose he had as good a right to be there as we had, although it was beginning to wear me down too.

"Hey, Mac," I said to him, when he looked over at us again, "*pore tront frank donnery moowah une image*." Which was my simple translation of the Lancashire remark to starers: "Ere, luv, for a tanner you can 'ave a photograph."

He made a strangled sound in his throat and looked sad like King Kong.

"Urm . . . sorry, *bat urd do nut spurk Fhrunch.*"

Well, that's a bond anyway, said I in my own mind, but Jeus called the patron and demanded the removal of this man who was destroying his nerves already destroyed from the hospitality of the penitent pilgrims.

"Ah, dees poor man, M'sieu Jeus, he does not speak French."

"Well, they've got the Berlitz up the road there, why doesn't he go and join that?"

"Maybe he will, now. He's just won the Loterie Nationale and he has no one to celebrate with." Pierre sighed. "*Le pauvre.*"

"He won the Loterie Nationale? And you allow the poor fellow to walk around there in loneliness with neither kith nor kin to share his joy? Shame on you, Pierre!" said Jeus with indignation as noble as that of Brutus's.

"Sit down at once, my good fellow. You are among friends now," he shouted to the big fellow, who came over and sat between us with eagerness and a big smile on his face.

"*Urm Schweed,*" said the big fellow.

"No matter a damn," said I, "if you are itself, whose business is it but your own and so long as you interfere with nobody."

"We will not let you down," said Jeus, "do not worry."

"Be not afraid," I echoed.

"Three bottles of champagne here," said Jeus. "Pierre!" he roared like a sergeant-major of a low type.

Pierre, delighted at doing such good business at ten in the morning before the real chef, came down beaming, and our big friend produced a ten-thousand-franc note and off we went. By twelve o'clock Jeus and I were cured, the big man was in great humor and we decided to go and eat at the Brasserie Lipp.

Coming down the Boulevard Saint-Germain I met some of the penitent pilgrims, who shouted at me, "Ah dere you are, Brindin boy."

"Away from me, ye hypocrites!" cried I with dignity,

and marched up the street. And then the thought struck me. These pilgrims were not onto such a bad deal, and I knew from the experience of the night before that nobody screws like a pilgrim on his way to Lourdes. I suppose he thinks he might never come back. Final passions are strong.

I mentioned this to Jeus, and on the heels of the reels we became members of the Pilgrimage of Repentance to Lourdes, carrying a large wooden cross, on which you could have easily crucified two men of normal size, from the Deux Magots on Saint-Germain-des-Prés to Chartres. On a fine summer's morning Jeus and I set out with hundreds of other artists and phonies of all description. Jeus carried the cross for five yards and then handed it to a Dutchman.

"I'm not worthy. You should carry this cross," Jeus said, and put the arm on the guy for two thousand francs."

We got off the electric train at Rambouillet on the route, which I understand is the summer residence of the President of France. The young clerk at the booking office directed us to the café where lunch was laid on for the pilgrims. Our modest statement that we were the advance guard of the pilgrims brought forth *le patron* himself and his entire entourage and the best of food and the best of wine as well.

We decided to do an auto-stop for the rest of the trip, with an adjournment here and there, eating and drinking what the pilgrims were supposed to be having. British tourists sometimes stop, Americans seldom, women and clergymen never, and our best bet each time was a truck. The driver would get out and have a look at us and, on hearing that we were two of a band of happy pilgrims, would eagerly give us a lift.

Finally we got to Chartres Cathedral itself, which is famous, among other things, for its stained-glass windows, but as they are so high up, I couldn't tell a deal about them. Towering and mighty, since the Age of

Faith, Chartres Cathedral was decorated by a group of sculptors, unpaid, and giving themselves, mind and muscle, for God's sake.

Jeus and myself wandered about the churchyard and didn't the pilgrims arrive carrying their huge cross so that we had to hide behind the tomb of an archbishop so that we couldn't be seen? But Aughrim was not lost, for as they entered the door, I hurriedly grabbed the cross from the proud pilgrim-bearer and brought it up to the altar. And for my religious efforts, the National Pilgrimage of Repentance stood myself and Jeus that night many liters of *vin rouge* of a good year.

We got a lift back to Paris the next morning from the correspondent of a London evening newspaper who was in Chartres to report on the proceedings of the previous day. He told us he was staying at the Hotel Trianon and invited us along for a drink. I think he only stayed at the place because he had a large expense account and used to give it a plug in his column.

He introduced us to an Englishman, who I subsequently discovered was a crook, and who had a fund of fantastic stories, one of which I remember quite clearly. Now I don't understand finance very well, but apparently to get gold into France was considered difficult and a good idea. There was this man who arrived in Paris wearing a gold boot. Unfortunately as he got off the airplane one of the immigration officers happened to notice that he had a slight limp and suggested to him that he might like to sit down while waiting to go through customs. The gentleman became so nervous that he eventually fainted. They undid his tie and his shoelaces and discovered, with amazement, the gold boot.

When we got back to the hotel that night, Jessica, Jeus's wife began tapping messages furiously in Morse on the table, and thinking it is better to be insulted than ignored, I went to bed.

We stayed in Paris four months, and on our last day we sent Jeus out to buy the breakfast, which consisted of a

liter of *vin rouge*, a long French crusty loaf and a box of Camembert cheese which was sold at the corner of the street for twenty-five francs because it was rotten. The French, contrary to popular belief, do not like to eat rotten cheese.

An hour later Jeus returned, very ornate and very sweet smelling, without the wine, without the bread and without the cheese, but with George, a Hungarian fellow.

"Where the fugh is our breakfast?" I asked sourly.

"I felt I needed a bath," says Jeus, "and there wasn't enough left over for the breakfast."

"You didn't need a bath that bad, you bastard," said Gabriel, but Jessica only shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't any of you guys ever take a bath?" Jeus snarled, baring his teeth like a dog at the show.

"No," I answered. "Only dirty people have to wash. It's like the Sacrament of Penance. When I am asked in Ireland if I have been to Confession recently, I always answer, 'No, that's only for sinners.' "

Once or twice in the heat of the Paris summer, at the cost of two shillings, I had gone into the Piscine, which is a sort of floating swimming pool on the Seine. But for one hour only. They control the length of time by a system of colored tickets, and when they shout out that it's time up for the yellow tickets or the blue tickets, it's no good gaming on that you don't know what *jaune* or *bleu* means. And you can't stop there till the place shuts and be charged the difference afterward—like traveling first-class on a third-class Métro ticket. The inspector, if he catches you, will waste no time bemoaning the dishonesty of any part of the human race, yours or his. He'll hold out his hand for a ten-shilling fine.

Gabriel and I thought this American emphasis on washing a bit much. And then George comes up with the suggestion that he stands us all breakfast at the Studio Bar, but first he has a proposition to make to me.

"Would you like to work in a brothel?" he asked.

At the time I had all my teeth and weighed eleven stone two pounds.

"Sure," I said, "if it's soft money."

"During the week you will have to satisfy old women, but at the weekend you'll be satisfied by old men."

"Thank you very much," I answered politely, for I didn't want to hurt his feelings. Every cripple has his own way of walking. "But this is not a proposition that appeals to me."

"What about me?" chips in Edwin Lang.

"Oh, no," says George, "you are much too ugly." And I thought Edwin would do himself damage for he pretended to be very vain about his personal appearance. He turned his head to the wall and became an upset bloke.

"Is it a condition of our getting breakfast that I work in this coeducational brothel of yours?" I asked, for my principles did not stretch as far as the hunger in my stomach.

"Certainly not," said George.

But Edwin was very hurt and said to go and have breakfast for he was going back to Ireland on his own. I thought maybe he'd snap out of it, but he didn't follow us out. So I said in my own mind, what can't be cured must be endured. We went on out without him.

George explained over breakfast that one of his extramural activities was writing pornography, and if ever I was in the need, it would be no trouble to put the writing of one or two articles in my way. I thanked him very much for I knew I would come back to France, which I had grown to love very dearly and felt was part of my inheritance.

After all, you might say that the Latin Quarter was bounded by the Rue du Bac on the northwest by the river and the Irish college on the southeast at the Rue des Irlandais, up behind the Pantheon, where Wolfe Tone plotted to free a people and destroy an empire on one hundred guineas and a hard neck, and where students waved their black shovel hats and cheered John Mitchel,

the old Republican Ulsterman, son of a Unitarian minister, who wiped his eyes from the warmth of a Papist welcome.

"Always Ireland with your people," said Jeus. "You think of everything in regard to yourselves."

Even the French Revolution, and who is more entitled? It was an Irishman led the people in the attack on the Bastille. He was a Wexfordman and a cobbler by the name of Kavanagh.

I was home for Christmas and went with my mother to see the eldest of us and we drank potheen, and right and all as it was, I fell to wondering what, in the name of our sacred and dearest old creditors, was I going to do for readies? In between hopping to France and trotting, leaping and dancing, I had got through all readies.

The following morning I was feeling like a corpse that didn't get Christian burial, but after I had backed two winners at the dog track on expert advice, back I came to relish a bit of turkey. In my childhood I spent lovely Christmases and we had a sight less than turkey, but we had youth at our side to make as merry a Christmas as ever you saw. But when all is said and done, with advancing years, a bit of turkey is very light, highly nutritious and altogether delectable and acceptable of a Christmas time. After turkeying and coming out on the street again and meeting people, all of whom were moaning and groaning and wondering how they'd get through January after asking one another how they'd got over the Christmas, I felt great.

I wrote my first play at this time, for the Barnes and McCormack Commemoration Concert which was to be held in the Queen's Theatre in the following month. It was called by the nonsensical title of *Gretna Green*, and I based it on the execution of the two innocent IRA men, Barnes and McCormack, for their so-called part in the bomb explosion in Coventry in 1939 which killed five people. A bit jarred one night I had agreed to take part

in it myself, but the rehearsals put years on me, and I told Sean Mooney, the stage manager, who was later to hold this position with honor and distinction in the Abbey, that I was a writer, not an actor. I watched it from the side of the stage and Jesus, Mary and Joseph, it would be better to forget it.

On February the ninth I was twenty-five, and after taking as many weeks as there are since the New Year to recover from the festive celebrations, my mother gently suggested to me, still again, that I might go down to the Union Hall and look for a job.

*Now Autumn leaves are falling,*
*And the light is growing dim,*
*The painter wipes his pot clean down—*
*And . . . ks his brushes in . . .*

# SIXTEEN

. . . Or, as the old saying has it, "Cover me up till the First of March," and look at it anyway you like, the time had come to be uncovered.

I went down to the Painter's Union, but had time over on the way for a word with Cathal in the Irish House to steady my nerves and to put me in the humor for regular employment. The secretary gave me a card and sent me down to a firm of painting contractors on St. Stephen's Green. When I arrived the foreman looked at me. "Oh, Jasus," he said. "It's yourself."

Now I am bound to admit that though not devoid of ambition in the graining, lettering and marbling line, my real talents lay not in painting. My father and grandfathers were painters, and at an exhibition of Patrick Swift's, Victor Waddington remarked that of all present my father was the only painter with a Union card. My granny was forewoman gilder in Brindley's of Eustace Street and, on my mother's side, the Kearneys were and are similarly engaged.

For all that, maybe because of that, I am allergic to painting. Not to paint, mark you. But to putting the stuff on.

I even like looking at a job well done and have been known, in the middle of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, to force the attentions of John Ryan and Frederick May,

who had the good fortune to be sitting either side of me, to a rather neat bit of repair filling on the Gaiety ceiling in Dublin. And in company with another literary refugee from the trade, Joseph Tomelty, I commented adversely on the papering of a nightclub in Villiers Street in London.

Joe and I agreed that it was "lapped" where it should have been "butted," which drew from the cynical lip of Con O'Leary the comment that in a new town the first thing a tinker looks at is his horse.

Strangely, there are few house-painter picture painters. There have been firemen artists, peasant artists by the acre, priest artists, policemen artists, child artists, and there are people who would claim that the famous English artist, Sir Winston Churchill, is an author. For the matter of that, there are not wanting those who make out that his colleague, Sir Alfred Munnings, is a horse. But seldom do you ever hear of a house-painter artist.

I remember once there was a fisherman artist, and his work was hung in very august surroundings and a big ha-ha in the papers about him being an uninstructed simple man and all to that effect, and at the opening of the exhibition old ones from the cultural areas were all gabbling round this chap, who had cleaned off the herring leavings for the day. He stood rather more stylishly dressed than the ordinary artist artists, modestly giving his opinions on life and art.

Then the door burst open and a very well-known Irish artist stood there, his massive frame adorned in the habiliments of a trawlerman. Enormous seaboots, a blue woolen jersey, sou'wester and rubbers he wore, and trailing from his shoulder was about twenty yards of tram net.

The first to recover from this apparition was the then chief among artists, an old man of ancient lineage who directed a stern and indignant inquiry toward the figure in the doorway.

"Sir, what is the meaning of appearing among your friends and brothers in this preposterous costume?"

From the doorway came the drawled reply: "Oh, I thought you knew. I," and with a nonchalant shrug of his net-draped shoulder in the direction of the serge-suited fisherman-artist, "am an artist fisherman."

However, as the man said, first carefully removing the butt from his lower lip, this foreman of the painting contractors on St. Stephen's Green had to employ me as I produced my card, for he wouldn't have been able to get any more men if he hadn't done so.

He gave me my kit, which was a set of brushes, and he told me to go down to the Gaiety Theatre. Now many's the time I had been there, as a member of the audience at least, since I was four or five, and the *pièce de résistance* was always a solo bit by a tiny tot who came in front of the line when the rest of the orchestra knocked off for a minute and danced on her own.

With all due respect to tiny tots and their fathers and mothers and teachers, I had as little time for that as I had for painting the joint. But when I got to the place, good Christ, what had I to do? The ceiling had to be painted. To get to it, there was a single six-inch plank leading out from the gallery, the same where I had been even afraid to sit two nights previously, to a number of planks where one single board was lowered to take up a further three foot of empty space to the roof. Underneath was an eighty-foot drop to terra firma below.

I nearly died seven deaths but being a natural coward I was more afraid to go home to my mother and tell her that I'd left the job than I was of getting on to the plank, so I climbed up there in a cold sweat.

However, in the course of a week I got more used to it, although I kept looking down on either side of me to the eighty-foot drop below. Anyone who says that you get used to heights is talking complete and absolute nonsense. I was terrified the whole time, but the way some of the painters were hopping round the board, you'd think they were walking on the pavement.

In the course of the first morning, when I got off the plank, as I frequently did, to look for fresh color, I met an elderly gentleman with a moustache called Jack Guilfoyle. He was wearing the old-time celluloid collar which was favored by some painters because they were able to wipe the paint off it with a turpentine rag and then wash it with soap and water. Jack Guilfoyle was a Protestant. He was a member of the Church of Ireland and one of the very few Protestants in the painting trade or in the building industry in Dublin who had never been a foreman and by reason of the fact that he was a drunk.

Somebody told me that during the depression Merrion Hall in Dublin was the headquarters of an extreme brand of Protestants who didn't have any clergy apparently, but held services which were conducted by building contractors and builders' foremen. Because it was a good place for getting a job, Guilfoyle, who was not a notoriously God-fearing man, went to a service at Merrion Hall.

A contractor called Jones was taking the service and he began to recite the Lord's Prayer, and when he got to the bit, "Give us this day our daily bread," all the unemployed workers assembled there shouted out, "Amen! Amen! Amen!" but Guilfoyle forgot himself even further and he shouted, "Amen! Ah-fughing-men!"

Now Jack Guilfoyle was a friendly fellow, and when he suggested that we go down to the corner in the lunch hour and have ourselves a bit of refreshment, despite the fact that I told him I hadn't any money, I was only too happy to fall in with him.

"That's all right," he said, "but just carry this box for me," and he handed me what looked like a child's coffin, only twice as heavy.

"Jasus, Jack," I said, "what ever is this?"

"Oh, it's only my toolbox," came the reply.

Now the height of tools that Guilfoyle would ever be owning would be perhaps a scraper and a putty knife from Woolworth's of the sort that women use in the home, but I wasn't in mind to be asking further, so I just

let it go at that. In the pub, he asked the barman if he might leave the tools with him.

"I'm up on a job at the Gaiety here," he explained, "and I'm only using brushes, and such tools as I want I have taken out of the box. I would like to leave the rest here in case some of the other skins would steal them. They are a very valuable set of tools."

In my own mind I thought, Jesus, they must be a motor mechanic's outfit. The barman took the box and put it behind the counter, and we ordered two glasses of whiskey and two pints of stout. Guilfoyle hurriedly swallowed the whiskey and I followed suit, taking a large slug out of my pint at the same time. We then ordered another round, and the barman, who was an innocent country boy, asked us for the money.

"That's all right," says Guilfoyle, "I'll see you on Friday, pay night."

"Oh, we don't do that here," said the boy. "I'm afraid you'll have to pay now."

"Look," said Guilfoyle, "haven't you got my very valuable box of tools as security? I have to come in on Friday night to collect them."

So eventually the barman agreed, but rather doubtfully, and we went back to work the better off for a few jars.

I remember at the time the Gaiety was putting on a show called *The Winslow Boy*, and rehearsals were taking place in the afternoon. Guilfoyle, on account of his age I suppose, was not shoved up in the roof but was painting the hallway leading to the stage. He had his ladder right across the entrance. The Winslow Boy, or the boy who was acting the part, was a blondie-headed youth of about fourteen, and he suggested to Guilfoyle that he move his ladder a bit so that he could get past.

"If you don't get out of my way," retorted Jack Guilfoyle, "you'll be getting a kick up the arse and a mouthful of three-penny bits that you won't be forgetting this day, nor the next."

The Winslow Boy had to squeeze by the ladder as best he could.

Although we went to the pub on the corner almost every lunch hour, in the evening we availed ourselves of different drinking places. One evening we went to a pub that was owned by an old man from Galway who had, however, spent most of his life in Manchester, where he also owned a public house. Now it turned out that he was a great Gaelic singer, and himself and myself went into the back room and, throwing back our heads, sang Gaelic songs to the darkened ceiling, over the upturned toil-worn faces of the men and women listening to us. There is no gloomier place, by the by, than a Dublin pub, because, as a rule, no singing is allowed and most of the talk is in whispers. It is a funny thing but you very seldom get a Dublin man owning a pub. The proprietors nearly always come from off the tops of the mountains and are to be recognized long before they open their mouths by the strange way they have of walking.

It is said that the sedan chairmen of eighteenth-century London were Irishmen. It is believed that their peculiar gait, from long practice in bog-trotting, made them lithe and delicate carriers of frail and elegant *grandes dames* to and from the ball and the rout. Don't ask me what the rout was. For long I have suspected that it described an entertainment similar to a meeting of tinkers at Ballinasloe horse fair. That sometimes finishes up in a rout, but the London aristocracy wouldn't be decent enough for that sort of sport.

Sure enough, in a matter of moments this old man's son, who had been brought up in Manchester, comes over and asks us, "Might we not give over this carry-on and speak English like everyone else and stop singing and making a show of ourselves?"

I answered him in the mellifluous tongue of Shakespeare, Milton and Johnson. After which I rather abruptly left the place.

The next night we chose a different public house and

on the way we found a temperance badge in the gutter, which Guilfoyle promptly stuck in his coat. Now this badge represents an organization in Ireland of about half a million members who favor total abstinence. There was a young apprentice barman of about sixteen behind the counter who was not more than a month or so off the bog, I suppose, and he looked at the badge and then in horror at Jack Guilfoyle when he ordered two pints. He left the bar and went across the room to a man standing in the corner talking to some people and back again, meeting himself coming back, having been told by the proprietor that he didn't give a damn what badge he was wearing, provided he had the money to pay for the drinks.

The young boy slapped down the Guinness in front of us as if as much to say, I hope it chokes you. Many years afterwards I met this young boy again and by now he was a fully fledged barman. I deliberately got him talking on the organization for total abstinence.

"I don't believe in them," he said. "I spent two weeks in Dublin as an apprentice barman and an old fellow came in with a younger man, and funnily enough, Brendan, the younger fellow he was with was not unlike you. He might have been a brother of yours, and he was wearing the badge of a total abstainer, but that didn't stop him from drinking two pints of Guinness."

On the Friday after we had been paid, I suggested to Jack Guilfoyle that we go to the pub on the corner on our way home and give the guy what we owed him for the drinks.

"We'll go halves," I said. "How much do you think it will be?"

"Oh," said Guilfoyle, "about one pound I should think."

So I gave him the money and waited to go with him to help him carry the toolbox which he had left in the pub.

"Go away, for Jasus' sake," said Guilfoyle. "I discovered that box here, in the theater, and I filled it up with

bricks and empty beer bottles. The barman is welcome to it. He can fughing well have it."

And I lost a pound.

After I had finished working the Gaiety, I worked on the reconstruction of the church at the bottom of York Street, which was being turned into a hostel to the Salvation Army, and then I was asked by a Union delegate if I would like to work for the Irish Lights. Now the Irish Lights is the organization that controls the lighthouses of Ireland, both North and South, and the headquarters are in Dublin. It is perfectly obvious that despite politics, partitions and borders, there is not a deal of sense in having a lighthouse on a border black one side and white the other, and it is more convenient for all concerned to have them under the one authority. The usual custom is that the glasses and the lights themselves are made in Birmingham—that noted seaside resort—and the maintenance of the structure is done by Belfast men, while the painting is done by Dublin men.

The English and the Welsh lighthouses are controlled by Trinity House, which means that myself and Winston Churchill were once upon a time in the same organization, he as an Elder Brother of Trinity House and I as a painter for the Irish Lights. His position was more decorative than functional, however.

I agreed to do the job and was given a card. Also with me was a friend who was a notorious drunk. He had been in the British Army during the First World War and had little to distinguish him from any other drunken Dublin house painter, except for the fact that had he gone to church at all, he would have gone to a different one from the majority of us. He was a Church of Ireland man, despite his name being O'Leary.

His son had escaped from the slums in which he was living by becoming a clergyman in the Church of England, and when his father arrived over in England for

his ordination, he was so blind drunk that he nearly made a ballocks of the entire proceedings. O'Leary was the only man I ever knew to be barred from an ordination, but the authorities put him out and kept him out.

On this morning, however, the pair of us arrived at the Irish Lights office in Dublin, sober and correct. We were to go to Donaghadee in the County Down in Northern Ireland and paint the lighthouse. Since this day, I have painted striped lighthouses, banded lighthouses and spotted lighthouses. We were given our equipment which consisted of paintbrushes, wire brushes, a blow lamp, knives and scrapers, which were put into two wooden boxes, and these were to be sealed with the official stamp of the Commissioner for Irish Lights, so that they wouldn't be searched at the border. If the Northern customs officers insisted on doing so, we had the alternative of coming back, as the boxes were as much the property of the Government of Southern Ireland as they were the property of the Government of Northern Ireland. Or Western Ireland, or for the matter of that, Eastern Ireland, where I happen to come from.

By the same token, I wonder how Ireland lost one of the cardinal points of the compass. We have songs, sneers, jeers and cheers for the "Men of the West," the "Gallant South," the "North Began" and the "North Held On," "God Bless the Northern Land" and all to that effect, but damn the ha'port about the East. There's not a mention of our geographical direction, nor a line for the Men of the East.

A lot of people are somewhat puzzled when I say that I come from neither Northern Ireland nor Southern Ireland. I am a wise man from the East, I tell them, and by the looks of my two little slitty eyes like Fu Manchu, it's easily seen that's where I do come from.

However, myself and O'Leary were given an advance of five pounds and the two boxes and, as the man put the

seals on them, he turned to us. "We always trust our men," he said, "that they are not going to take advantage of these seals to smuggle anything into Northern Ireland."

"Certainly not," says I, and O'Leary, who had a great habit of saying, "Beyond a shadow of a doubt," said: "Beyond a shadow of a doubt."

As soon as we got outside with our equipment, says O'Leary, "The first thing to do, before we waste our substance, is to buy four bottles of whiskey this side of the border." For at that time there was a considerable difference in the price of liquor between Northern and Southern Ireland.

We went into the nearest pub, a stone's throw from the Irish Lights office, and ordered a couple of pints of Guinness. O'Leary then called for the whiskey and proceeded to break the seals off the boxes and shove in the whiskey. On my inquiry in a sarcastic tone of voice as to what he was now going to do about the seals, he put his hand in his pocket and produced about a hundred of them, which apparently he had nicked from the office when the bloke wasn't looking. Very carefully, with a razor blade, we removed the old seals and replaced them with the new. I could have said new wine in old boxes, I was that gone in a weakness.

We drank so much that eventually we had to go to the Union Hall and borrow the money for the fare, and a couple of quid besides, and we got on a train at Amiens Street Station and arrived at the border, I am bound to admit, still pretty drunk. After opening our battered-looking cases containing our personal effects, if a couple of old dirty shirts can ever be so described, the customs officer's eyes focused on the boxes.

"Open these," he said.

"I can't do that," I answered. "These boxes are sealed by the Commissioner for Irish Lights. Have a look for yourself."

The officer began to read slowly, "the COMMISSIONER . . ."

"That's the lighthouses," I interrupted him, for I wasn't in mind to be arguing with this pox-faced bastard. "And furthermore," I said, "you'll be falling out with Winston Churchill among other people if you make us open these boxes. You know that the Irish Lights control the lighthouses of Ireland, don't you?"

So this guy had never heard of them, but after a consultation with a colleague of his, we were allowed to proceed. We arrived in Belfast about noon, and after a bite to eat and a sup to drink, we moseyed round to the Labor Exchange in Corporation Street for our Social Security cards and ration books for food. And Jasus, in the Labor Exchange didn't we find this half-wit of an eejit to end all eejits?

"Ah," he said, "you're birds of passages from Eire." But he pronounced it Ayr.

"Ayr," says I, "is in Scotland, but I would not be ashamed to come from there because one of the greatest poets that ever lived, Robert Burns, was a native of Ayrshire, but you're such an illiterate bastard you probably wouldn't know that."

His face reddened up. "How dare you speak like that to me?"

"Like what?" says innocence.

"Using that foul language in here."

"I didn't use any foul language," I said. "It's obvious, despite the fact that you are English (no disrespect to the breed, for you get objectionable folks from all classes, creeds and nationalities, I've even seen them at home), that you don't know your own language, for the word I used is a piece of Norman French and is a legal term relating mostly to royalty. However," I continued, "I did not come here for a discussion on either literature or geography. I came here to get Social Security cards and ration books for the pair of us to enable us to fulfill our rightful jobs in the North of Ireland."

I walked away from this junior Hitler and went across to a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary who was standing nearby.

"What's the trouble?" he said.

"Myself and my colleague here," I explained, "have come up from Dublin today to do a lawful job of work for the Irish Lights, which is a Thirty-Two County organization. As a matter of a fact, it is a department, indirectly, of Trinity House in London." I didn't like to mention the fact that I had often been in Belfast before on an unlawful job of work, hat in hand goes through the land. "And furthermore," I said, "if this man refuses to give us our cards, I will find out his name and I will go back and make out a report of the whole incident to the Irish Lights and I will personally see that he returns very smartly to whatever slum in Fulham, S.W. ninety-six, he comes from."

"Take it easy," said the constable. "Here is the manager." And a tall, dark-haired man with an easy smile came toward us. I noticed that he was wearing a Masonic ring, but he was a Belfast man so I explained the position once more to him.

With a "Yes, sir, no, sir, three bags full, sir," from this half-pay of a Limey idiot, our cards were filled out one-two-three. Oddly, to Behan as a surname he didn't seem to object, because, I suppose, he didn't think it was Irish enough, but my Protestant British ex-service friend, O'Leary, had his cards flung in his face.

"Listen," I said to him, "what is the good of fighting and arguing? Will you answer me one question and a civil one? Have you enjoyed your eight years in Belfast?"

"How did you know I'm here for eight years?"

"Well," says I, "this is 1948. The war got rough in England in 1940, so I presume that is when you decided to dodge over here." And I drove this dervish to such a dance of fury by this last remark that we decided not to push our luck and left.

So if he got medals for insulting people at the Belfast Labor Exchange, he certainly was not so good at insulting the Germans and the Italians.

"Goodbye, now, Dodge-the-War."

# SEVENTEEN

We got on the bus for Laganbank Road where we were to catch another one to Donaghadee. On the way down, a schoolboy sitting beside me in the bus pointed out Stormont, the Government buildings of Northern Ireland, and, I must grudgingly admit, one of the most beautifully set parliament buildings I have ever seen. It stands on the top of a hill, out in the country, and in the front of it is a large statue of the late Lord Carson, which I am happy to say, in my ballocks, was shown to the old man before he died.

Lord Carson was at school with Oscar Wilde, whom he also prosecuted at his famous trial. And as Oscar himself remarked, it was "with the added bitterness of an old friend."

But the right name of this clam-headed old butcher was Carsoni; he was the son of a Dublin Italian and not from Northern Ireland at all, any more than was Galloper Smith, the first Lord Birkenhead, who also interested himself in our affairs.

And I did not let on to this schoolboy that I had seen Stormont before.

My schoolboy guide next remarked that Purdysburn Mental Hospital was further down on the opposite side of the road to Stormont. I think it is most appropriate that any parliament building, whether in Dublin, Belfast,

London, Vladivostok, Moscow, Peking, West Berlin, East Berlin, North Berlin, New York, Washington or any place else, should have a mental hospital *en face*.

"The bus is now passing between misery and madness," I said to O'Leary who was sitting across the aisle from myself and my new-found friend.

"Beyond the shadow of a doubt," echoed O'Leary.

I laughed in my rich Southern brogue, low but musical, and an acid-faced lady in the seat in front called the schoolboy to order. When the seat beside her was vacant, she called your man over to it, and glaring at me, breathed fiercely in his ear, and he answered, "Yes, aunty," and "No, aunty," and sat staring straight in front of him for the rest of the journey.

It appeared that she didn't like "Southerners." I had not encountered this kind of carry-on before and it made me feel important and tragic, like the dust jacket of a Peadar O'Donnell novel in the big block letters of the thirties. When I heard her speak to the boy at the end of the journey, I was surprised to notice that she had an American-type accent.

However, it was a lovely summer's evening and I put the incident out of my mind while O'Leary and I went along and got a room at the Lighthouse Café, where we handed our ration books to Bert, the proprietor. And he expressed himself as well pleased, because it appears that we were given extra rations. We got sailor's rations, though I don't know why we did because we were not sailing anywhere. Thanks be to God, the lighthouse we were to paint was a shore station at the end of the pier.

In the bar that night, I remarked on the acid old one in the bus to the fishermen I was with.

"Och, aye," said one, "that'll be Miss Mackenzie. She's from Toronto and she's in some Ulster Society to save us from yous. She can't bear the sight of a Southern man and it's very dacent of her, seein' as she was never in the country before in her life."

And to cheer me up: "Of course, yous have a crowd in America, too, that goes around blackguarding us."

The Fosters and the Nelsons were the names of the fishermen. A quiet, decent crowd with names of magic to the Belfast children, generations of them, who know that the sea is blue and misty soft where it is nearing the smudge of Scotland and the Lough a drowsy blue all the way to Bangor. That it's always summer at Donaghadee.

The next day was a beautiful one and O'Leary and I went down to meet a harbor master who was called by the good old Northern name of William. After bringing us down to the lighthouse he came back up to our room at the café to have a couple of shots of whiskey.

"Although this is Dublin whiskey," I told him, "it is Protestant whiskey; it's Jameson's."

"I don't give a fish's tit whether it is Mohammedan whiskey," he said, so we opened two more of the bottles we'd carried across the border, and after a bite to eat we opened two more, so not a deal of work was done that day.

In the evening I left my friend O'Leary with William, for I was still young enough to be interested in female society and was not sufficiently alcoholic at the time for it to make any difference. I changed my clothes, put on a tie and had a shave in readiness.

Round the North of Ireland they are very fond of holding what they call "beach meetings," so I went to one where I noticed a girl who was wearing a CE badge: the initials for Christian Endeavor. Yes, said I in my own mind, I am going to do some Christian Endeavoring with you.

I looked up at the preacher and turned to the girl. "You know," I said, "that man has many cogent and logical arguments." In actual fact all the silly bastard was doing was shouting the odds about the Pope. But in matters of prick, there can be no principle.

"You're RC," she said.

"Arsey," I replied.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Yes, sure. I am a Roman Catholic but this man is seriously affecting my views on religion."

And he was shouting out, "The Vatican spreads its tentacles all round the world!" And in a form of lunacy known only in Northern Ireland, he continued, "There is an alliance between the Pope in the Vatican in Rome and Stalin in the Kremlin in Moscow!"

"Don't leave out Maurice Chevalier in the Place Vendôme," I shouted.

"Quite right, sir," he answered, not knowing what I had said.

After the meeting, the girl decided that I was a brand to be plucked from the burning and she agreed to go for a walk with me. If I said I seduced her, I would be telling an absolute lie, but I would have liked to. After all, I would be only striking a blow against heresy. Unfortunately I had nothing against this little heretic, although I would certainly have liked to have had!

"I can always tell a Fenian," she said.

"How?" I asked.

"By their wee button noses," she replied in a serious way.

Now religious prejudices are not usually logical, but if you could see my nose you would see how utterly and absolutely illogical this statement was. By the same token, she was nearly fit to be in the Ku Klux Klan or the Catholic League of Decency.

However, I undertook to meet her the next day after work to go for a swim. I'd really no hope of even getting a good look at her heretical little person, but I wanted to see what kind of swimming togs she wore. I presumed it would be a double-skirted kilt.

In the morning, O'Leary and I started work on the lighthouse and I had to rewrite the lettering on the board: "Permission to view this lighthouse must be obtained

from the Secretary, Commissioners for Irish Lights, Westmoreland Street, Dublin."

Although I had done a bit of lettering here and there, I must be one of the worst sign writers in the world. And I don't think any sign writers in Ireland are very good, but their house painters are the best in the world.

Only a portion of the old sign showed through the fresh paint, but enough to let Miss Mackenzie, the miserable old strap on the bus, know that an Ulster lighthouse had some connection with the rebels. She was among a crowd of holiday-makers out for an after-breakfast stroll, and she breathed fury as I rewrote the sign on a surface previously coated with raw linseed oil: "Permission to view this lighthouse must be obtained from Eamon de Valera, Leinster House, Dublin."

I thought Miss Mackenzie would explode. She fulminated in the crowd, but the people that go to Donaghadee in the summer have a deal to bother them, fishing young Sammy out of the harbor and trying to save wee Bella from death by ice-creamitis. They gazed with mild interest after her as she dashed up to the Harbor Office. By the time she got back, of course, I had the board rubbed dry and the official legend rewritten. She put her hand to her head and searched, distracted, for the offending words, nearly having a heart attack into the bargain. It was all the one to me. If anybody gets a heart attack over political matters of this sort above the age of twenty-five, he deserves to have one, in my opinion. William looked at her and then at me and muttered something about the heat and old ones going round in their bare heads. With innocent diligence I went on with my work.

There was an old-age pensioner and his wife down from Belfast on a holiday on what little savings they had, which I don't think can have been very much. After they had read the notice, they explained to me that by the time they had written to Dublin to get permission to view the lighthouse, their holiday would be over.

"It's a pity," the old man said, "because I have never seen over one and I would really like to."

Heartened by the experience of the early morning, I decided to push my luck.

"Come right in," says I. "It's all yours. Be my guest."

And I showed them both round and told them a bundle of lies about how everything worked, because I had never been in a lighthouse before in my life. At the end of the tour, I gave them both a slug of whiskey and they were well pleased because your man said it was a long time since they'd seen the drop.

"Irish Republican whiskey," I said.

Your man looks round nervously. "I'm an Orangeman," he says, "but who's to know?"

On the eleventh of July, I was tactfully requested to refrain from servile toil the following day, the anniversary of William III's Protestant victory over James II's mixed Irish and French Catholic army at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

I put up with this check on my industry as best I could, but only after I had persuaded William, the harbor master, that eleven-and-a-half-hours pay, which is what O'Leary and myself were getting each day, was in order for inhabitants of the Free State who did not recognize the Twelfth of July as a bank holiday. As a doctrinaire republican, I seldom lost an opportunity in the enthusiastic days of my youth of making propaganda for the rights of man.

In fact, so well did my morale stand up to the enforced idleness that I was in singing order among a pubful of Orangemen that night. When called upon for a song, I was let out of school, and as cute as a Christian, discretion being the better part of valor, I chose "The Dear Little Town in the Old County Down." Though the company were decent Protestant fishermen, you never know what half-fool is lying in the background waiting to make a name for himself by crowning the stranger

with a porter bottle. However, though it's me says it that shouldn't, the song went down like a dinner.

We went down like a dinner for another reason as well, though O'Leary could nearly be wearing a plaque round his neck he was so anxious to be telling everyone he was a Protestant. We flogged the fisherman gallons of paint for the price of a pint and a chat up at Anderson's snug. Later in the evening I was in the hotel bar. Myself and the French chef stood chatting with Anna, the barmaid. Now we two fellows were not that gone on each other for the simple reason that Anna was nineteen and I was twenty-five, and the chef nearly went mad when I pointed out he was born the same year as I. He said I was born at the beginning of '23 and he at the end of it. Three more days and he'd have been born in '24. Now I could hardly be responsible for the chef's being born on the twenty-ninth of December. The arrangements were none of mine.

The coxswain of the lifeboat came in and told us to take it easy and not to be making a show of ourselves in front of Anna. He was a great little man who won the George Cross for his efforts to rescue people from the *Princess Victoria*, which sunk in the few miles of the Irish sea between England and Ireland—a great example of British and Irish seamanship.

Although I think the coxswain rather liked me, I think he had it up a bit for O'Leary who spoke in a flat Dublin accent the same as my own, but was constantly telling everyone he was a member of the Church of Ireland. I think the coxswain was a little suspicious of him and didn't appreciate him very much. He understood me, however, because I did not conceal the fact that I was a Catholic fanatic and a daily Communicant and I went to Confession every week—in my sweet imagination.

"Are you going to stop here in Donaghadee all day long tomorrow, Brendan?" he asked.

"Yes, sure. I'll go for a swim or something."

"But there won't be anyone here. We march out to

Millisle to celebrate the Twelfth. Why don't you join us?"

"It's all right for O'Leary," I said, "but I might feel a little embarrassed, and who's to know but that some of the boys might get a little jarred and look around for someone to lynch?"

"That's ridiculous," said the coxswain. "Everybody knows you're all right and the boys often do a deal with you for a drop of paint and they will all be there. You can travel out with us in the bus and see the whole affair from the back window. Unless of course you have any objections on religious grounds?"

"Not at all," I assured him. "I would watch anything if there was any beer on the job."

"There'll be plenty of that. It is not a dry hooley. There are temperance Freemason lodges of the Orange Order, but ours is not one of them."

The following morning we went out on the bus halfway to Millisle, where the boys got out and marched the rest of the way with their lodge, under the banner of William crossing the Boyne on his white horse. It is said that William was never born and his horse was never foaled: they were both obtained by Caesarean operation. How the fugh anyone would know is a mystery but that is the kind of shit one hears about these historical figures.

I decided that I might as well be into bed without a barracks, that is, I might as well hear the proceedings, so when the bus got to Millisle, I got out. Now I always enjoy any kind of religious or political screwiness, and when it is directed against myself, I find it extremely entertaining. The next thing I knew, I was pushed right up to the front, next door to the speaker, a very prominent Northern Ireland Unionist Orange member of Parliament. I suppose the boys thought that if they put Brendan up in the front where he can hear it all, there would be hopes of converting the heathen.

"Would you hold my hat, son?" said the prominent

Northern Ireland Unionist Orange member of Parliament as he rose to take his place up on the platform.

I just nodded because I did not want him to hear my accent.

"Brethren and sisters," he began. And up like a shot with him, he launched into a bitter attack on the Dublin government and how sorry he was to say that the Control of Employment Act in Northern Ireland had not kept out a vast number of Fenians.

"There are Dublin scum in our midst," he said. I clapped along with everybody else. "They shall be driven out!"

"Hear, hear!" I echoed with the masses.

Finally, frothing at the mouth, in a professional way, he revealed the joint conspiracy of the Kremlin and the Vatican.

"I gave it to them, there, didn't I?" he said as he returned to his seat.

"You certainly did, sir," says I.

And I thought he would pass out in a weakness. "Jesus, where are you from?"

"I'm from Dublin, sir."

"Ah, of course, you're one of the Dublin brethren?"

"I'm a brother of all men," I said.

"You mean you're an Orangeman?"

"No," says I, "I'm an ex-IRA man."

"And a Catholic?" He hissed the words as though he was not able for them.

"A great number of people in Dublin are in serious doubt as to what I am, sir, but from your point of view I am a Catholic and my father and mother before me. Nobody belonging to me was ever anything else, but I won't say they were very good Catholics. The only thing I will say, however, is that none of them were ever fughing Protestants. And furthermore, I'll tell you one thing: you are sure to be elected at the next election. I cannot see the people in the North acquiring any more sense than the people in the South, and there are enough

suckers here to put you in." He put up his hand to interrupt me but I was not done yet. "I notice you didn't say anything about unemployment in the North," and I looked straight into his face for I was full of Dutch courage, or Gaelic courage, from the flask of whiskey in my pocket.

The Minister looked a bit surprised but not angry, and I didn't care now. "The part I really enjoy in all the speeches of Orangemen and extreme Protestant ministers is the pronouncement of a joint conspiracy between the Vatican and the Kremlin. I will tell you this much," I continued. "If you went out into the world, and there is one outside of Northern and Southern Ireland, and you stood up on the platform and told your audience this in Paris, London, Rome or New York or in any of the main capitals, you would have them rolling in the aisles. This is a wonderful angle. The native Protestant Irishman is the only person on the face of the earth who is in telligent enough to see the fughing menace of Stalin and the Pope."

That lovely summer's day I'll remember, too, for the singing of an old man from Millisle. "By the Light of the Silvery Moon" he sang, and disappointed me because he didn't sing something more Orange. We had a great day of singing and drinking and eating, and though I did feel a bit shamed by my lagging of the Unionist member of Parliament and by the bright sunshine when we came out blinking into it at closing time, it wasn't long before we got indoors again.

There were some that did not go to bed at all that night. A few devoted revelers had made a night of it. They stood wearily on the corner and an old one asked me what time it was. I told him.

"Thanks be, it's over for another wee while," he said. "I'm beat out."

I wasn't so favorable to it myself when I'd to get out of bed in the morning, but I was soon swimming around the harbor like a two-year-old with Anna and my little Prot-

estant heretic swimming it out between me. And at that time I was a very strong swimmer.

"Tomorrow," I said to William, who had come to the harbor to have a look at me, "there's another feast, *le Quatorze Juillet.*"

"Is it a Fenian do?" asked old William.

"It's the greatest Republican feast of the year," said I. "The Fourteenth of July, and you had better come down to the hotel with O'Leary and myself in the evening."

"It'll kill me," he pleaded.

"Well, we celebrated yours," said I.

" 'Deed yous did," said old William resignedly, "and fair is fair."

It was a great day and I rounded it off in the hotel by singing any songs about France that backed my own side. Everyone joined in, for as I said, apart from the hatchet-faced old strap on the bus, I had never encountered opposition from the North. Didn't my own family find refuge in Belfast after 1916? It was like this.

My mother had two husbands, not at the one time, of course. She married the first a little time before Easter Week, 1916, and spent her honeymoon carrying messages for her husband, brother, brothers-in-law and generally running round with my aunts and her sisters in misfortune, shifting one another's dumps and minding one another's babies for a long time afterward.

Belfast figures as the refuge in cozy remoteness and peace, after the battle had ended and the hunt left behind, because it was there my mother had her first home and her husband had his first job after the Rising. It was there that she began her married life, and after the guns and the bombs and the executions there began a stock of more homely domestic anecdotes, like the time she tried him with a curried stew and he ran to the tap after tasting it, wondering why she was trying to poison him.

They weren't the only refugees either. A former Cap-

tain of the Guard at Leinster House is remembered with indignation for coming in among the twenty or thirty people assembled in close formation for the Sunday night *scoraíocht*, and remarking through the haze of Irish tobacco smoke that the place was like an oven.

And after Rory, my stepbrother, was christened "Roger Casement" in the church, my uncle Peadar, the same that wrote the Irish National Anthem and a sort of walking battery of Fenianism, held him in his arms on Cave Hill, and with the baby's father acting as sponsor, swore him into the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The little house in the mount became a clearing house for the Dublin crowd to and from Liverpool and Glasgow. And to this day, my mother remembers the kindness of the neighbors. Their great interest was the baby Fenian, though being polite and respectable, they never referred to his politics, nor to the comings and goings and up-country accents of the young men visiting the house at all hours of the day and night. There might be a satisfied remark about the larruping the Germans were getting on the Somme, but when the Peelers came nosing round the quarter, it was the widow of a Worshipful Master came up with the wind of the word.

"There were polls round here this morning, ma'am, inquiring about some people might be hiding from the military in Dublin. Rebels, if you please, round here. Sure, as we all said, it's an insult to a loyal street to think the like. Rebels, Sinn Feiners, hiding round here. And how's our wee man the day? Did you do what I said about the . . ." And so on.

My first visit to the North, or for the matter of that to any part of Ireland outside Dublin, took me to Newry, with a trainload of soccer players, accordionists, corkscrew operatives, the entire production under the masterly direction of my Uncle Ritchie. He was a nonmilitary uncle, and indeed, had been accused of only remembering the significance of Easter Monday, 1916, by refer-

ence to a gold watch, his possession of which dated from that day.

Another souvenir of the six days was a pair of fur-lined boots, which were worn out by my time, though they still hung, in their old age, under the picture of Robert Emmet and "Greetings for Christmas and a Porsperous 1912" card from "Dan Lehan, the Patriotic Sand Dancer and Irish National Coon. Performed the Soft Shoe before the Crowned Heads of Europe, also Annual Concerts, Mountjoy, and the Deaf and Dumb Institution."

When Uncle Ritchie had a sup up, he'd fondle the old fur boots and looking from Robert Emmet to the Irish National Coon he would remark: "By God, there was men in Ireland in them times."

When the other Jacobs and GPO uncles were hard at it remembering the sudden death of a comrade, Uncle Ritchie shook his head with the rest.

"When you think of what they did to poor Brian. Poor pig. Cut the two legs off the man. Them Danes."

Gritting his teeth and controlling his temper, he would look round the room and a good job for the Danes that there weren't any of them knocking around our way. He wasn't really my uncle at all, but a far-out relative of another branch of our family from around north and east Dublin. Mostly he didn't bother much about the cause of Old Ireland or any of that carrying on. When he was bent in thought, it wasn't the declining Gaeltacht was knotting his brow, nor the lost green field, but we respected it just the same.

He sat in a corner and looked the same way as our uncles remembering the time they met John Devoy or killed one another during the Civil War. But we knew that this deep cogitation meant that Uncle Ritchie was thinking up a stroke. His final stroke brought me to Newry. He hired an excursion train for a deposit of thirty shillings, and our team went up to play a team representing the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

In consideration of his putting up a set of solid silver

medals for the contest, Uncle Ritchie's nominee was allowed to take half the gate, and he collected the ticket money from the people on the understanding that he would bring it to the GNR on Monday morning and receive a small percentage for his trouble.

The whole street saved up for a while and the train was packed with old ones, young ones, singers and dancers on the way up. Uncle Ritchie got the team in a corner and swore that, by this and that, they had to win those medals, and most serious about it he was. Someone asked who were the Ancient Order of Hibernians and was told they were a crowd that carried pikes, and someone else said they'd lodge an objection that you wouldn't see the like of this day nor next.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians had no pikes, but before half time they could have done with them. They were all over our crowd in everything except dirt. The double tap, the hack, the trip, the one-two and every manner of lowness, but to no avail. The Ancient Order of Hibernians won two-nil. Uncle Ritchie had to hand over the set of medals, and though he wasn't a mean man, you could see he felt it. He muttered to get us down to the station quickly and lock the carriage doors. He wouldn't be long after us.

Neither he wasn't, as the man said. But came running down toward us with half the town after him, and they shouting and cursing about the medals. Someone said they weren't bad medals considering they were made out of the tops of milk bottles. The crowd was in full cry after Uncle Ritchie, but gaining little. We shouted encouragement to him, "Come on, Uncle Ritchie, come on, ye boy, ye!" Till at last he fell against the gate of the Residency and we hauled him in the carriage in the nick of time from the berserk natives.

Carrie Swaine, a Plymouth Sister from Ballybough in the South, called out in triumph, "Go 'long, yous Orange beasts!" which for some reason drove the Ancient Order of Hibernians Amateur Football Club to a very dervish

dance of fury. Past Clontarf Station, Carrie smelled the Sloblands, and from excess of emotion shouting, "Lawvilly Dublin," put her head through the window without taking the trouble to lower it and nearly decapitated herself.

Uncle Ritchie gave a big night in the club and was seen off by the whole street to the Liverpool boat. He expressed no bitterness against the town of Newry or its inhabitants except to remark that the medals were waterproof. I don't know what he told the railway company. However, all good things must come to an end, and having stretched the Irish Light's assignment to include worthy celebrations of Orangemen and doctrinaire Republicans, O'Leary and I returned to Dublin.

# EIGHTEEN

When we arrived in Dublin, O'Leary found he still had enough of the readies for a visit to his clergyman son in England, and I had enough, and more beside, to get me to Paris. We made the trip together as far as London, where we parted wishing each other good luck, beyond the shadow of a doubt, and all to that effect.

Once in Paris, I got on a number ninety-five bus in the Avenue de l'Opéra for Saint-Germain-des-Prés and in like a shot with me to the Studio Bar. I was not disappointed. George, my Hungarian friend, was still there, sitting with two other fellows that I did not know. Donal, the smaller man with a mass of hair rising straight up from his head, was working for an American-owned magazine called *Points*, while Desmond was the Paris correspondent of the *Irish Times*, which is not only the smallest of the Irish newspapers but the best. And he seemed to be on quite a good deal, for the French thought the *Irish Times* must be as influential as the *London Times* apparently, and Desmond was invited to nearly all the diplomatic receptions.

After I had agreed to write pornography in English for French magazines and poems in Irish and stories in English for the American magazine, *Points*, we settled down to more serious business. With the drop of *pastis* in my hand and the noise of clanging pots and pans in

my ear, I fell to wondering whether I was no longer able for it, when Desmond said he heard them too. It was the band of the École des Beaux-Arts. In the popular imagination the École des Beaux-Arts is a sort of *Tir na nOg* of young geniuses, painting and sculpting with fresh, savage efficiency during the working day, cursing the professors, damning all academies, till the light fades, the stars rise over the garret, and the *midinette* knocks timidly on the door and comes in the bottle of wine, the piece of veal, the garlic, the bread and cheese.

And apparently, I said in my own mind, they have a band.

During the summer nights they have a march-out at least every Saturday night, up and round the narrow streets of the Latin Quarter, playing in close harmony on buckets, tin cans, biscuit tins, old motor horns, auctioneers' hand bells, basins, bowls, and with a male and female voice choir, in sections variously represented by the howl, the screech, the moan, the groan, the roar, the bawl, the yell, the scream, the snarl, the bay, the bark, in time to the steady and rhythmic thud of the big brass dust bin and the more somber tones of the tin bath.

Along the street the foreigners smiled and nodded indulgently at each other. Dear old Paris. Dear old Latin Quarter. Has never changed since Gene Kelly's feet were hot, since the last time we were over.

We wondered at the sour looks on the faces of the French, and at the disgruntlement of the big vegetable porter who cursed the noise and said people had to be up at five in the morning to go to work. Don't worry about work, I said in my own mind. Those lads outside aren't worried about work. Free spirits, they are, and being a free spirit myself, I ordered another cognac.

Outside they were advancing on Saint-Germain. I turned to Desmond and amid the satisfied sighs of the foreigners in the place, shook my head indulgently and remarked, "Woe to the begrudgers. Aren't they gas men, the art students? *Is maith an rud an óige.*"

"They manage an imitation of it," said a voice beside me.

I turned and saw that a girl had come in and was standing beside us.

"What does who manage an imitation of?" I asked.

"You said in Irish that youth is a great thing. You were obviously referring to those dreary architects making a nuisance of themselves up the street."

"What architects? Anyway, how did you know what I said in Irish?"

"I suppose I went to school as much as you did."

"That'd be small trouble to you. But what architects are you talking about?"

"Those fellows going around the place, doing the hard chaw, keeping everybody awake. You, like all the tourist—"

I choked with indignation, and Desmond, Donal and George gazed at her with disgust. The foul word that had just left her lips stamped her, in all our eyes, as a cad, or a caddess. It's not a word used in polite society along the boulevards, unless you are speaking of somebody else, of course.

She went on relentlessly.

"You people think it's all very romantic, but those little architectural students, as soon as they qualify, buy a nice suit, grow a moustache, and refer to this period as the time they were sowing their wild oats. I wouldn't mind that, but I've got to get up and go over to Neuilly and be at the Church of Saint Pierre in the morning to do some work." And she held up what looked like a kit of tools belonging to a bricklayer.

Kathleen Murphy said good night to us and went off up the Rue Dauphine, a trim slip of a girl, as they say at home, but swinging her hammers and chisels with an air.

The Church of Saint Pierre is the parish church of Neuilly. It is about the size of the Dublin Protestant Cathedral and is nearly a hundred years old, no older than the University Church on Dublin's Green, and as beauti-

ful, in a different style. The parish priest of Saint Pierre had just enough money to keep the church in repair, to pay a couple of charwomen and a verger. He had nothing over for ornamentation of the lovely stone that practically shouted for a chisel.

God's help, they say in Irish, is never further than the door, and in this case, the door of the École des Beaux-Arts. Someone in the school heard of all this lovely stone going unadorned, and the next thing a squad of students are out, fighting to divide the church up among themselves.

Kathleen Murphy comes away with three pillars, and with hammer upraised, poises her slim self to strike a blow, *do chum ghlóire Dé agus onóra na hEireann.* These pillars represent, in their tortuous Celtic way, the struggle of Christian France against the Huns, the Creation and the Deluge. Standing there one morning in the Church of Saint Pierre in the quiet of the Avenue de Roule, the noise of the traffic round the Étoile and on the Champs-Élysées dim in the distance, I noted lovingly the twisted features of each cantankerous countenance, thought of Raphoe, Cashel and Clonmacnoise, and heard the waves of the Atlantic break on the Aran shore, and the praising voice of the holy Irish, long since dead, soft in the gathering bustle of the day. And I blessed the chance introduction to Kathleen Murphy in the Studio Bar.

Soon I was earning an existence, if you want to call it that, by writing pornography and by supplementing it with one or two of my poems and stories which were published in *Points*. Anyway, I had sufficient enough to enable me to frequent many of the bars in the Latin Quarter and for them to recognize me too. Also, I naturally gravitated, as all *clochards* do, to the markets.

On this morning, I was in a Les Halles bistro called Le Nouveau Siècle. And I was drinking a demi of beer, having not eaten for about forty-eight hours, and I was

over it for about two hours. Even if I had the fare, I didn't wish to return to Ireland, because I happen to regard Ireland in the same way as Sean O'Casey: It is a great country to get a letter from.

For the want of another beer and the price of a chat, I engaged the barman in conversation. And sure enough, me being in luck that day, doesn't this girl come up and introduce herself?

"I'm Jenny Ètoile," she said, which means "Eugenie's star," but really meant that she had formerly been operating up round the Étoile, which is all the streets leading off the Arc de Triomphe at the top of the Champs-Élysées.

"I heard you speaking to the barman and I think you're English."

"I'm not," I said. "I'm Irish."

"Well, you were speaking English. Can you speak American?"

"Sure," said I. "They're much the same language."

"Would you like to work for us?" Would ducks like to swim I said in my own mind, but to her, "Who's us?"

"Myself and Monsieur Tony, the chef."

The following day at Le Nouveau Siècle I met Tony, the *très bien maquereau* and, after wining and dining me, I was duly appointed the *sous-maquereau*. Now I'd been around a lot in my younger days, but this was my first employment as a pimp. I was taken to Trois Quartiers and introduced to seven or eight girls, manna from heaven, and fitted out with several suits of clothes, shirts, shoes and ties. I hadn't felt so well in ages and all I had to do was to go to Harry's New York Bar and pick up a little trade for the community. It was owned by a Breton, a Celt like myself, but the four barmen were Irish-American, because most of the clientele were American. I would contract my business from the corner of the bar by the telephone.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I have never seen anybody

slower than the Yank. If he was let loose in a convent, he couldn't get a woman. I would be sitting up at the bar and these middle-aged Americans would come across and ask the barman what had happened to all the girls they'd heard about in gay Paree.

"That's okay, friend," I would say. "I'll fix you up," and I would go to the telephone and contact either Jenny Étoile or Monsieur Tony, and the girl, like a shot with her, would be outside Harry's New York Bar in a taxi, before we'd had the first drink.

"That the giving hand may never falter," I would say, as the Americans peeled off a few dollar notes for my trouble, and I would entertain the astonished company with songs about my native land. Rich in liquor, my voice carried round the room.

"Paris is full of them," someone remarked.

"He's Irish," another said, "and there was never any shortage of them."

Practically every night a certain extremely fat man would come into the bar with his mother, but not for the want of hearing a stave, as I discovered. I always thought of them as inseparable, for to tell the honest truth I had never seen them apart. Until this day when the fat man asks me if I would get him a girl. His mother had left his side for the few minutes it takes to attend to the call of nature.

"Sure," I said. "But it will cost you a bit extra—weight for age and all that. Besides, the girl that's going to have you, has a kind of proposition on top of her."

It was all the one to him, but what was he to tell his mother?

"Tell her you're going to midnight Mass and it is a Mass only available to men. It's a men's sodality."

So, in a matter of minutes, but not before the old one had come back, the prostitute gets out of the taxi and comes into the bar looking for her client.

"There's a midnight Mass in Notre Dame," I shouted

for everyone to hear me, giving the prostitute the wink as I did so. As he left, the fat man slipped me ten dollars. Sipping the *pastis*—a bird never flew on the one wing—I was able to explain to his mother the fundamental principles of men's sodalities and the custom of some orders in France of dressing their nuns in plain clothes.

During the course of my activities in Harry's New York Bar, there was an American who sat by me by the hour, and he sat in silence. For Jesus' sake, it would put years on you, and I got to the point of asking him if he wanted a girl.

"You know," he said seriously, "there are some people who don't like girls."

"I haven't met many, but is it a boy you're after?" I inquired in a manner very casual.

He looked aghast.

"Look buddy," I said. "This is Paris, not Boston."

Eventually he agreed that he would like a boy, and I was after fixing it up with Monsieur Tony, being more in the men's department, when the question of color arose. There was a colored boy who met all the required specifications, for my American friend would not be fobbed off with common bowsies or the likes of them.

"Did you want a white boy or a black boy?" I asked.

"How dare you insult me," he sputtered. "I will have nothing to do with a black." And I remarked in passing that if he had any future need of his gizzard and didn't want to be at the loss of it, it would be as well if he kept his own company.

A man sitting at the table rose and shook hands with me. It was another Irishman who had been in Paris since 1930 for the simple and sufficient reason that had he remained in Ireland he would have had to pass a few years in Glencree Reform School.

During the war he dealt in scrap iron, which made him a target for the FFI, because it was strictly a collaborationist activity in that it assisted the German war ef-

fort. In actual fact he was only collaborating with himself, and on several occasions sheltered fellows on the run from the Gestapo and the French militia. Afterward, when he heard the FFI were looking for him, he went into hiding because he thought he would be shot for his scrap iron activities. However, instead of six ounces of lead, he got the Croix de la Libération for sheltering men from the "dirty Boche."

For many months I worked in Harry's New York Bar, until this day the Breton manager tells me he has observed my activities and this is not a bordello and all to that effect and I must go. So go I had to and go I went.

However, before leaving, each of the barmen insisted upon buying me a drink. Now many years later my life at the bar caused me a moment's discomfort, and this is how. In 1959, my play *The Hostage* represented Great Britain at the Théatre des Nations, and as I was quite a big shot at the Festival I was given a car by the French Government and also a guide. The guide was an old friend of mine, but not from today, nor yesterday, but of eleven years previously, and, eager to get in a bit to tee-hee before he'd ask me how I was ever since, I shot forward to tell him how happy I was to be shown round Paris, being a stranger in these parts and unversed in the language, and conversing with fluent sleeveenery, we piled into the car.

My guide was well equal to the ploy, and the hazardous business over and my just getting down to my second wind, when Jesus, Mary and Joseph, didn't I notice the tricolor flag on one side of the car and the Union Jack on the other?

"In the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, would you mind telling me the meaning of the Union Jack? Why have we got this disgusting rag on the car?"

"Your play is representing Great Britain."

In terror at what he might be saying when we first met in front of the dignitaries, my blood had gone cold

at the sight of the guide and I had forgotten the reason for my visit. Now it was beginning to flow red, white and blue.

"I'd forgotten that," I said. "Stick up another Union Jack and I might get a bit more trade."

Flaunting my glory before the world, we drove round the Latin Quarter and into the Pergola Restaurant where the still large and affable proprietor welcomed me warmly, bidding me farewell even more warmly when I left several hours later, having entertained his customers with Pernod and many verses of the "Internationale," sung in English.

Alas, it was the *pastis* and the "Marseillaise" in the Theatre Club that destroyed us.

The next day, my guide remained in his room, the heavy curtains drawn to keep out the bright light of the spring day. I was to go to the reception at a famous American bar with a guide from the French Ministry of Culture, he told me.

"Oh, Jesus," I moaned. "Harry's New York Bar. I never have an hour's luck."

As we started out on our stately drive, flags fluttering in the April Paris air, I kept telling myself that this was ten years later and more, and probably the staff had all changed.

We stopped for a while at a place off the Avenue de l'Opéra, with Desmond in mind, for I knew he was still often in the place, but the few shots of absinthe would taste none the worse in his absence. My man from the Ministry of Culture was getting restless, and it was, at last, with legs of lead that I walked into Harry's New York Bar.

The same Breton manager who had expelled me from my pimping activities came forward with a, "Welcome Mr. Behan," and the same staff echoed, "Hello, Brendan!"

And my guide, astonished, asked, "You know Mr. Behan?"

"Sure we know him," said the Breton manager. "He used to work over there, in the corner, by the telephone."

The Ministry of Culture inquired when my treatise on Harry's past would be published, but the answer was lost in the clinking of glasses. But all this was to happen a good while later.

# NINETEEN

It seemed a century standing there shouting, "For the love of Jesus, will you ever open the door," before my father came down the stairs and opened it.

"You're not coming in here in the middle of the night upsetting your mother," he said. I pushed past him. "You jackeen from the North City slums," which is an expression I am extremely fond of and often use about myself.

My father said nothing but went on up the stairs and I followed him up.

I was up early in the morning and went downstairs to the kitchen to say good morning to the old one. She was in the kitchen, standing over the stove.

"Ah, there you are, Brendan," she said in her easy, gentle way. "The da said you were home. You're just in time for your breakfast."

"I don't want any, thanks," and I was surly with it too.

"You don't want any? Sure, it's ready and the tea is wet and all."

"I'm in a hurry out," said I, in a sulky tone so she would know there was something up.

"It's not out to work so soon you're going?"

I went out of the kitchen for the smell of food was making me sick, and I could not eat anything till I'd got a few drinks into me. That was really why I did not stay

for breakfast, though I was hoping to get a bit of consideration for my wounded pride at the same time.

I hurried down to the Markets for a drink.

"*Ara, Dia dhuit,*" says Michael to me. A nice old skin, though I'd sooner heathens than publicans. "God Bless you."

"God and Mary and Patrick, Bríd and Columcille to yourself, Michael, and to every decent person in your house."

Cathal Goulding, Gabriel MacCarthy and the crowd lined up at the bar, and sitting in a row along the wall, all intoned the responses. "Amen, amen," answered the porter, sharks, whiskey kings, wine lords and cider barons. And Michael, the publican, added, "Amen, O Lord God," for he was a genuine religious man and one of the few religious men that was not a worse bastard than ordinary people.

Several hours later Gabriel and I, by now considerably improved in my health, came out blinking into the sun, but it wasn't long before we got indoors again in Davy Byrnes's. Here we met The Fixer. Now The Fixer stood about six foot tall and was a native of the Northeast of England and was known for the fact he'd been a British agent during the war in Italy, though some said he was an Italian agent during the war in England. I personally think that he was an agent for himself, but Scotland Yard gave him the benefit of the doubt and freedom from all his sins, past, present and future. He was also a very good man with boats, and I heard him ask Gabriel, whom he had met before, whether he would care to take a trip with him.

"We're going first to Newry in the North of Ireland, then to Rouen in France and then back to Glasgow," he said. And to Gabriel's remark that this was one hell of a strange way to go to Glasgow, he replied, "I've got business to do—on the wrong side."

My ears pricked up, though I have never seen any-

body's ears prick up, for I was more in mind of becoming a smuggler than ever I was a house painter.

"I could go along with you too," I said.

"And what the hell could you do on a ship?" asks The Fixer.

"I could steer," I said truthfully, for I had learned the art off my family. In the winter when there wasn't much work at house painting, some of them used to get employment as hawsers. They would take a little dinghy out of a sailing ship, take a heaving line off the ship and take the line into the shore. The line was put round the capstan and the seamen turned the capstan which brought the ship in. As a chiseler I had watched them do it many times, almost as if I was steering the ship myself.

It was agreed that I should join them, and after the formalities of getting a British seaman's certificate and The Fixer calling up to my father, who was twenty feet up on the roof of a corporation house, that he was taking me away to sea and my father shouting down to take me anywhere he liked and to fughing drown me at sea if possible, I boarded the *Sir William* on the Liffey.

It was eighty-six tons register with no plant for electric lighting and had been originally owned by a man called William Johnson, from the west coast of England, who had one arm and was always full of rum. Apparently he felt that as the king hadn't given him a knighthood, he wouldn't be troubling the king but he would give himself one. So he called the ship, *Sir William* and himself, Sir William Johnson. There is something to be said for these old English salts, for with his rations, which consisted largely of bottles of rum, he sailed the ship single-handed, so to speak, all round Land's End in Cornwall and up to London, where it was purchased by The Fixer.

We sailed with a mixed crew. Some had been on a boat before and more hadn't. The real sailors were the skipper, the mate and the Welsh fireman, Taffy. Now The

Fixer believed in the Munster School of Economics, which meant buying in the cheapest labor markets and selling in the highest, in this case to himself, for Taffy had been on the pool of seamen and had been entitled to a salary every week, whether or not he had a ship. But to remain on the pool he had to be in good health, and when he was medically examined it was discovered that he was suffering from tuberculosis, so he was sacked. In that way The Fixer was able to hire him for about two-thirds of his normal wages and work him about one-third longer the hours he would normally be working on board ship.

The skipper was a very pleasant and talented man, an engineer, a very good navigator and a good seaman anyway it took him. He was also a radio expert and had worked in that capacity for the BBC during the war. Unfortunately he had a weakness for backing horses and every time we got into port, he would lose everything he had.

The rest of the company were merchant adventurers, and Gabriel and myself were merchant adventurers' laborers, so to speak. The real sailors slept forrad, and we had accommodation aft, where villainy could be plotted in peace.

Smithy and Jonesy came aboard wearing very natty London suitings and Windsor knots of some dimensions. Smithy's tie was scarlet silk with aluminum leaves and Jonesy's was blue silk with gold leaves. Yes, said I in my own mind, if the Duke of Windsor invented this way of fixing a tie, he had to have some way of passing the time. Both of them were shareholders in the enterprise and had come on board to see how the good work was going. I don't think either of them had ever been on a boat of any description before, and till they had heard from The Fixer, thought they'd been done away with like the trams.

The sailors we left forrad, brewing their tea, darning

their socks, winding the dogwatch and, with infinite skill, putting little ships into bottles. The Fixer, Gabriel, Smithy, Jonesy and I retired aft to drink rum, like sailors. There would be no shortage of bottles.

We sailed up the coast to Newry on the eleventh of November, and arrangements had to be made with the Urban District Council for the shipment of a cargo of apples and a British Customs Manifest to say that we'd come from a United Kingdom port and therefore would not be subject to the usual customs examination.

"When we get our cargo of apples," said The Fixer, "we dump them three miles outside the coast, except for a few boxes which we will need as a cover-up for the real cargo we'll be collecting from Rouen to take over to Glasgow."

We all nodded our heads in agreement as we marched up the main street of Newry on Armistice Day, and The Fixer goes into this shop and comes out like a shot with him carrying large poppies.

"Look," I said, "I want to explain—" but The Fixer turns round and puts up a warning finger, saying, "Nark it, Brendan, will you. I don't want any explanations."

"No, we don't," said Gabriel. "Nor for the matter of that, any principles about wearing poppies and us going to sea to do a stroke."

So I said nothing until we got to the hotel, where we were meeting the chairman of the Newry Urban District Council, all decorated with large poppies in the lapels of our coats.

"Listen," I said, "I am trying to explain to you that although this is Northern Ireland, it is the southern part of Northern Ireland and up here they don't go in for poppies."

The Fixer, always a fair man in matters of porter, thrashed this out over whiskeys and gins and tonics at the pub opposite and it was generally agreed that we should throw our poppies into the gutter before going

into the hotel. "Only a nicker wasted," said The Fixer.

We met the chairman of the Urban District Council and The Fixer shook him by the hand.

"I'm very upset about what the dirty bastarding Protestants have done to you 'ere in the name of England."

The chairman's plumbeous face turned blue and his stomach heaved the protest.

"How dare you," he croaked. "The vice-chairman of our council is a highly respected member of the Presbyterian community."

His indignation collapsed for the want of breath, and over a couple of drinks gave The Fixer the chance to explain that it was a joke. We got the apples and a few days later we were out to sea on our way to France.

For the first two days Smithy and Jonesy were as sick as dogs, and when they finally emerged from lying in their death agonies, looking rather pale and shaken, they went up on deck. It was a fine morning with a nice fresh wind blowing behind us. The skipper had left the mate up at the wheel and had come down the companionway carrying a wooden box. Smithy and Jonesy, who were feeling a bit peckish by this time, as neither had eaten anything for forty-eight hours, inquired as to whether the box contained sandwiches for them.

"I'm sorry, lads," said the skipper. "I've no sandwiches in this box, I've got my father."

And it was assumed that the skipper, who was no mean partaker of the rum and orange, had been overindulging himself. "Be reasonable, skipper," said Smithy, "how could you put your father into a little wooden box like that?"

So the skipper explained that his father had been cremated and that he left a wish that his ashes be cast off the coast of France, which we were now nearing, because the skipper's mother had been a Frenchwoman. He proceeded to open the box to cast forth his father's ashes upon the waves, and Jonesy stood sadly by, mainly be-

cause he never took his hat off. He wore it on the Kildare side, even in bed, for he had not a rib between him and heaven. Gabriel sang under his breath a rebel song, while I hypocritically made the sign of the cross and gabbled some of the Lord's Prayer.

But the skipper was so overcome with emotion that he flung his father's ashes into the wind, rather than with the wind, so that they blew back at us and more down the ventilator where The Fixer was brewing his hot rum.

"What dirty bastard is throwing out clinker into the wind again?" he shouted up.

In the time it takes to count to ten we were down to explain that it was not clinker, but the skipper's father, and reverend and respectful with it too. At the wake, a few minutes later, the entire crew was drinking to the skipper's father. And not alone were we drinking to him, but we were drinking of him, because some of the ashes had got into the rum. However, no harm to that—they were perfectly hygienic ashes.

In the half-light of the following morning, we went ashore at Rouen and collected a cargo of more sensible goods: brandy, a small amount of wine and nylons, all of which were in short supply in England at the time. After we had loaded up our little ship, The Fixer got a fit of nostalgia for Paris where he had spent some time as a British agent during the war. He offered to take Gabriel and myself with him and I was eager to accept.

We piled into a taxi, no less than a big Delage, which, once on the main route, ate up the distance. We arrived at a place opposite the Dupont in the Boulevard St. Michel, and The Fixer indicated to me a spot where a collaborator had been shot stone dead by a Resistance man, who was now a member of the police force. We went to a hotel on the Left Bank in the Rue du Bac, and standing at the bar, dressed in the uniform of the *flic*, was the very man himself. The Fixer introduced me and invited him to join us for lunch.

Sitting in the corner of the restaurant, drinking a fruit juice or looking at it, was a girl I recognized instantly. She came toward The Fixer with outstretched arms.

"This is Jenny Étoile," he said, and if she recognized me, as recognize me she must, the muscles of her face barely flickered and she discreetly left.

The Fixer ordered us an excellent meal of *soupe á l'oignon*, a dish of which I am extremely fond, and steak, but the slaughterer of the collaborator declined the steak on the grounds that he was a good Catholic and never ate meat on Friday. The rest of us sinners did the meal more than justice.

After the bill had been paid, we went up as far as the Mabillon, where we had a *café fine*, and then across the Place St. Sulpice, up the Rue Servandoni, over to the Jardin du Luxembourg and into the Boulevard St. Michel again for another one. I had never seen The Fixer in such form. He was as carefree as a boy on a school treat, as indeed so was I for the matter of that, and our lungs felt the better for the use they were put to as we sang our way back to Rouen.

On leaving the boat on the Clyde, The Fixer told myself and Gabriel that he would see us at the Celluloid Bar on the Quay in an hour's time. This cinematograph title turned out to be the *Céilidh Bar*, which the Irish spell *céilidhe*, the Gaelic word for dance. But despite the uncompromising Scottish spelling, we found the place all right.

Over pints of porter, The Fixer suggested that I paint the mast of the *Sir William*, and I readily agreed. The following morning I climbed up the mast and the ship started rocking. Being very yellow, I didn't know how to hang onto the ladder and paint the mast from the top down, so I started from the bottom up. Given an hour, give or take one way or the other, I would have had it finished, neat and trim, but doesn't The Fixer come up from his cabin for the breath of air, just as I am steadying myself on the deck with barely a foot painted?

"Good Jesus," he says. "I know you're a kind of a half-hour sailor, but at least I thought you were a painter. Do you usually start from the bottom?"

"No," I answered a bit sheepishly, "but I was trying to ease myself up and get myself used to the height."

"The height? On a little ship like this? I've often pissed higher."

From this and subsequent trips I remember every single landmark going up the River Clyde. Before approaching the mouth of the river, on the starboard side is the Island of Aran and the light of Lamb Lash, and there is Greenoch and Gouroch and Paddy's Milestone, Ailsacraig rock, right in the middle of the Firth of Clyde. Alongside there is King George V dock and the coaling station, and opposite, the Singer Sewing Machine Factory, built of red brick and looking very up-to-date with a neon clock to the front of it. Then there is Jamaica Street Bridge, with the Clyde Quay on the one side and the Broomilaugh on the other.

But all good things come to an end, and many many months later in the Ceilidh Bar The Fixer and I parted company, remarking that Partition was strategically and financially useful.

On my return to Dublin my mother indicated to me that one could be either a house painter or a sailor in her household, but not a writer, embryo or otherwise.

So I went to the household of a good Republican lady, which was mainly supported by the efforts of Irish-speaking navvies from the West of Ireland, whom she fed mostly on bones, the bones coming from the butcher's backyard behind the house, where they had been left for the rats to clean off the meat. Hilda would collect the bones, fresh out of the rat's mouths, for she was very much up for them for the stock-pot. They were so cheap and nourishing, she said.

But it was as much as these poor unfortunate navvies could do to lean on their shovels to support them, and

they were eager to complain about their diet to me, but I pretended not to understand them, although I understood them just as if they were speaking English. For the truth of the matter was that myself and Cornelius Mackie, an ex-IRA man from the West of Ireland, were eating happily, like fighting cocks, and we were given eggs beaten up in milk, sometimes with a drop of brandy, for to recover us from our supposed ill-treatment in British and Irish jails.

Finally, one fellow gathered up enough English to question Hilda.

"Madam, 'oo soup me but no meat me?"

And Hilda had to drink a Baby Power whiskey, for she wasn't the better of herself, and said she would get a handful of old rubbish from the butcher in the way of lights, in future, and the bare bones in the stock-pot bubbled angrily at the thought of it.

On bold and venturesome days, the rats would come into the house. It was bad enough going into the kitchen, but sitting there on Hilda's dressing table in the bedroom, it would put the heart crossways in you. I stood looking at it, in fear and trembling, but Hilda, in her easy way, would shoo the animal off. "Go down, pussy, go down," she'd say.

With few exceptions she scorned to use mattresses, sheets and blankets, but rather bought sofas at second-hand auction rooms. The lodger would be told to use his knife and slit open the sofa and slide into it, which is fair enough until this lodger brings a girl in with him. She didn't exactly know where to go or how to screw herself, for screwing was the operative word, into this mattress situation.

Then there was Dick, the young actor, who insisted on sheets and blankets. One night, the Culchiemachs wished to play a game of pitch and toss, and the only way they could stop the pennies from rolling round the floor was to put down a blanket and to toss the two coins onto it. Up like a shot with them and into Dick's room,

who put his hands lovingly on his groin, for belonging to one of the two theaters in Dublin known as Sodom and Begorrah, he thought he was going to be raped.

"Oh, dear," he wailed. "Now you mustn't come at me like that—not in sixes and sevens."

"Come on," said the Irish fellow. "Take your hands off your brains. Give over nursing it. We only want your blanket for to play the game of pitch and toss on it," and he pulled all the bedclothes off as he spoke, leaving the poor bastard with ne'er a rib between him and heaven.

Cornelius Mackie did not go a great deal on this no-bed-clothes lark, so he thoughtfully provided his own, as did myself for the matter of that. But he was in a great state of undoing in case his brother Sean should find out the manner in which he was so unaccustomed to living. But, to the best of my recollection, when the brother duly arrived up, he got into bed beside Mackie and stopped there for six months. And as was his wont, he developed a great trade in the city of Dublin of flinging himself under the cars of foreign ambassadors, who would usually settle out of court. Except for a few bruises and a broken ankle caused by the intervention of a well-meaning dog, Sean didn't do too badly out of this transaction.

Also living in this house was a highly respectable woman who worked much for the Church, and on occasions when we met on the stairs, she would take time off to warn me of the company in the kip.

"Everyone in the place is not as good living as you are, you know."

And at the time I was making my living by helping to dope greyhounds. I became very well informed as to the form of dogs at any track in England or in Ireland. Whereas house painting is a trade and gambling a gift, it was the gift that was improving my health in these times, though I don't like racing myself, because the track racing is too dull and the coursing is too cruel. I

did go coursing betimes, for the screams of the hares gave me the excuse to stop in the tent drinking whiskey to drown the noise.

I was also writing bits of poems and articles and a second play, *The Landlady*. The stories and articles were published mainly in the *Irish Times* and in *Irish Press*, but John Ryan also published some in his magazine, *Envoy*. The play I wrote in longhand, and my cousin, Seamus de Burca, typed it for me, but it was never published.

Now I cannot imagine anybody in the ripe years that I have reached writing for fun. I agree with Dr. Samuel Johnson, a very great Englishman, that the man who doesn't write for money is a blockhead.

While I was still at Hilda's, a friend of mine from the County Clare told me a very interesting way of getting a kip for the weekend, which was to go to a retreat run by the Jesuit Fathers at Milltown Park in Dublin. On the fact of it, it was for free, but the clergy usually expected that you would put something in the box of a more substantial sum than you would normally be paying at a hotel.

My friend was speaking from personal experience, no less. He had gone to this retreat, and believing himself more in need of the charitable donations, not alone did he lessen the weight of the box, but he left wearing a priest's overcoat in which he found, tucked in the leather-lined pockets, the price of several pints.

There was great agreeing going on in Donal's Public House off Grafton Street, the night I borrowed it, and bejasus I would stand for no competition in the singing line for it was a smart outfit, when a slap on the back that sent my spine crossways through me, and the breath with it, softened my cough.

"Father, that was massive," said the stranger. "What are you having?"

Cathal and Gabriel swallowed a few times and looked at me as if they'd drop dead before giving way to the laughter, and I covered up my embarrassment and, to

a certain extent, my shame, in the overindulgence of bravado.

"I'll have a glass of malt."

"You're a very jovial man for a priest. Will you give me a blessing with the glass of whiskey?"

Fugh off, you old balloxy-faced craw-thumper, I said in my own mind, but to him: "Sure, sure I will, if you get me another one."

"You're a really good priest," continued the stranger, stoutly. "If there were more priests like you, there would be less sinners."

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, would he ever go away and leave me alone to enjoy the price of a chat? These are quare times. In Grafton Street, which is literally the fashionable center of the city, the literary intelligentsia had discovered that I had been writing pornography for French magazines, in English of course, and now I was to be plagued by an animal of a different character.

"The blessings of Jesus on you," I said to the stranger, and several hours later, as we walked the Dublin streets, I confided in Cathal and Gabriel that I would be leaving for France in the morning.

*Someday maybe, I'll go back to Paris,*
*And welcome in the dawn at Chatelet*
*With onion soup and rum to keep us nourished,*
*'Till the sun comes up on*
*Saint-Germain-des-Prés.*

# TWENTY

I WANTED to return to France, for the fact of the matter is there is everything to fit an Irishman in France. He can even find a good Irish excuse for getting into any political argument there.

And the Frenchman has good time for us. Once, at a party given by some students from Trinity College, Dublin, on the Ile de la Cité, I dived into the Seine from the Pont Nôtre Dame. The *pompiers*, or river fire brigade, shone searchlights from their boats.

I hardly had my clothes on when the *flics* were down, wanting to know what I thought I was making of the place altogether, and where I was from and had I my papers? I showed them my papers, and they saw the cover of my passport and bothered no more. One nodded to the other not to mind me, that I was an Irishman, and tapped the side of his cap to indicate that I was one of the Gormans of Grange and a foreman in the puzzle factory. He saluted and wished me a civil good night and they went off, much gratified.

I think the Paris river firemen were under the impression that ours was a rather premature celebration of the Quatorze Juillet, when there is dancing all over France. And I'm willing to celebrate any day. As a doctrinaire Republican, I seldom lost an opportunity, in the enthusiastic days of my youth, of making propaganda for the rights of man and the principles of '89, by singing any

songs about France that backed my own side. I had no king, nor wanted any, and if I went looking for a chief, I'd know where to look for him, above in Arbour Hill, where my old man, not long out of Gormanston himself, brought me and held me up on his shoulder to give three cheers with the rest of the crowd on a Sunday morning.

I hope my taste in French politics may be indulged so far as to permit me to repeat a story told to me by Desmond Ryan, whom I saw a deal during this trip. It is about Marshal McMahon, who was being interviewed by the press shortly after his inauguration as President of the Republic in 1873 and was asked a question about his health.

"I do not feel well at all," replied the old man. "Anyone that ever suffered from cerebral meningitis would be as well off if they died from it. For it either kills one or leaves one a hopeless idiot. And I should know—I've had it three times."

One of the avenues off the Étoile, at the top of the Champs-Élysées, is named after him. Next but one to Avenue McMahon is the Avenue Hoche, named for the Bantry Bay general.

When Wolfe Tone founded the Society of United Irishmen in 1791, it was to the French revolutionaries that he turned for assistance to free Ireland from the tyrannies of the English. And after persuading the French to send over an expeditionary force under the able generalship of Hoche, didn't the English, with ever luck on their side, have the weather too and a gale of such proportion that, not only did the flagship of General Hoche lose contact with the fleet, but the fleet itself was prevented from landing. Wolfe Tone returned to France with them, a disappointed man. He records in his diary:

"The door opened and a very handsome well-made young fellow in a brown coat and nankeen pantaloons entered and said: '*Vous êtes le citoyen Smith?*' I thought

he was a *chef de bureau* and replied, '*Oui, citoyen, je m'appelle Smith.*' He said, '*Vous, vous appelez aussi je crois, Wolfe Tone?*' I replied, '*Oui, citoyen, c'est mon veritable nom.*' '*Eh, bien,*' he replied, '*je suis le general, Hoche.*' "

Bad luck to the wind at Bantry, said I to myself many a time, walking down his avenue. Saint Joseph's Church is there and outside you'll see the crowd gathered on a Sunday or holiday, just like any Irish church anywhere.

The ambassador and embassy crowd, Aer Lingus officials, some very correct governesses, a few nurses from the American Hospital at Neuilly, an odd artist or musician on a scholarship to the Beaux Arts or the Conservatoire, some business people and a collection of citizens whose most prized possessions, next to their Irish passports, are their hard necks. They are the gayest of the crowd, and though the governesses move closer to the ambassador as they move off, they bow their hard necks in homage to the embassy staff as they move on toward the Arc de Triomphe, and the diplomats smile to each other in resignation, and the stout figure of Father O'Grady, C.P., appears at the door, to wave a benevolent hand on all and sundry, and it would be a poor sort of an Irishman could leave Paris without a salute in his direction.

Another of the avenues off the Étoile is named for Victor Hugo, who made a personal appeal to Queen Victoria to spare the life of Pat O'Donnell, who was hanged for shooting James Carey, the informer.

*It happened in the Phoenix Park all in the*
*month of May,*
*Lord Cavendish and Burke came out for to*
*see the polo play,*
*James Carey gave the signal and his*
*handkerchief he waved,*
*Then he gave full information against our*
*Fenian blades.*

Hugo was born very far from the elegant street named after him, in the Rue des Feuillantines, off the Rue Jacob, and not far from the Irish College, over whose walls, it is said, a student climbed in '48 to join the barricade at Saint-Germain. His name was MacHale.

It is for no one event in her history that we remember the Fourteenth of July, Bastille Day, but our affection for her place in our own history in bad times, and now in better.

Now these days in Paris, as on other days in Paris, I was often in the company of my old friend Desmond, who was a man very able for the wine. On one occasion, in the Hôtel Louisian, he was with myself and Albert Camus and a row developed, with the result that Desmond was left with a black eye. And as luck would have it, he had to go to a diplomatic reception that day. Desmond asked me if I ever thought he could go looking like that and would I for God's sake mosey over to the druggist and get something for it.

Myself and the man in the chemist had a conversation that passed off very civil, with him telling me that he went a great smack on leeches, though with them all crammed up in the jar, I wasn't out of my mind about them. I came the far side of Desmond and put the leeches, one by one, to suck out the blood that was under his eye, but as each leech worked, it dropped to the floor dead.

In a passionate temper the druggist told me they were valuable leeches and he looked lovingly over to the counter where not long since he had tendered them. He bent his head and all I could see was the rest of him shaking, gone in a kind of religion.

"How do you think they died?" he whispered, and then, nastily he said to Desmond, "Are you an alcoholic?" and he admitting that he was.

"Goddamnit," he said. "Why didn't you tell me? I've got alcoholic leeches."

Albert Camus was a great writer. In England, Ireland

and America, a great many people sound the "s" in his name, but I happen to know that he did not, for the simple sufficient reason that he told me so.

Like myself, he was a soccer fan and we agreed that the best soccer to be seen is in England, which is the home of association football. He suggested to me that I go over to England with himself and the proprietor of the Hôtel Louisian, for Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspurs were dueling it out that Saturday. Out of, perhaps, mistaken loyalty to the British Crown, I did not like to mention that I would have been delighted to go, except there was an expulsion order against me.

As a chiseler, I had watched many exciting matches in Ireland, and I remember well the replay of Dublin versus Galway, amid a shower of rain as thick as the boots we wore those times. I was sitting beside a priest on the sideline, and when the people were going off, he absentmindedly gave me an Afton cigarette and remarked that some people were made of sugar. I thought that I must have a kind of dispensation against catching cold and stopped there in the showers of rain till the finish.

In such a downpour, I arrived home. I could have changed my clothes and got into bed, only half Ireland seemed to have got themselves into our street, looking for shelter, and if they weren't afraid to hide them from the Black and Tans on Bloody Sunday, fourteen years earlier all but two months, neither would the people of Russell Street put the crowd back out into the elements that day of deluge.

In our house we had a hooley, and the measure of our accommodation was not such that we could have a hooley and get into bed at the same time.

My father played the fiddle, amiable as always, anything from "The Blackbird" to "The Lady in Red," and we danced and sang the night away, till in very short order I got pneumonia and found myself in Temple Street Children's Hospital.

Ned MacCann and Charlie MacMahon were the heroes of Dublin kids these times, but we won neither hurling nor football and had to put up with it.

Camus was subsequently killed in a car accident with a representative of our joint French publisher, Gallimard, which shows, perhaps, that it is not safe to travel with publishers. They are a breed of men, and the only recommendation I can give them is that they make a couple of shillings for us all.

In America they teach journalism, but in France it just overtakes you, and although I was doing a deal of writing, for a man whose needs in the eating line are few, it was, surprisingly, not long before I was without the price of a pint. Reluctantly, I went down to the Confédération General de Travail, which is in one of the side streets off the Boulevard de Magenta, near the Place de la République, and I told the delegate that I had passed the London City and Guilds examination in Painter's Work, which includes lettering, that my father was a top house painter in Dublin and my ancestors had been for generations in the trade.

He wrote it all down in a little book and passed me on to the section of the union for house painters, and I was given the job of painting a house out in Saint-Gratien, west of Enghien, a resort of Jewish families from Paris. The secretary explained that, as a foreigner, I couldn't belong to the first-class section of house painters for about six months, and he handing me my wages for the week as he did so.

"The blessing of Jesus on you," said I. "First class or second class, may the giving hand never falter."

The next morning I met some of the other painters on the job at the Gare du Luxembourg where, over glasses of rum, which is the native drink of the French proletarian, the chat was mainly directed on the weather and there was a sign of rain in the sky this morning and maybe we will have it before the day is out and all to that

effect, and on we traveled to the Gare du Nord, where some had coffee, but the more, rum, and the chat more friendly with every sip. Eventually, and a more happy crowd I've yet to meet, we got out at Saint-Gratien, where, to put me in the humor for work, I drank four or five more rums.

M. Monti, the owner of the house, was a decent old skin, for many a one who had led a more sheltered life would hope never to see the likes of us arriving on his doorstep. But M. Monti, after telling us that he had never met anyone worse than himself in the course of his travels, gave us all a glass of wine and a cigarette, which I thought then and still more now, as the qualified bearer of the title of ancient bowseyhood, was very civil of him.

The French, I discovered, are extremely good at filling, at making up a surface, but they use round brushes and I knew as much about painting with this type of tool as my arse did about snipe-shooting. And I had the humiliating experience—and my family and all belonging me in the trade—of a boy of sixteen being put over me on the filling and giving out the pay on how it should be done. What can't be cured must be endured, but it wasn't long before I had persuaded M. Monti to let me enamel several of his doors, an art of which the French know nothing, because it is not very much used in the country. And if I say it as one who shouldn't, I became quite popular with him as I was fairly good at it.

There was a woman on the *Queen Elizabeth* one time, who told me that the reason English industry was falling behind in foreign orders was that the working man indulged in too many tea breaks, though I noticed her aversion to this particular form of indolence did not take into account the gallons of tea she drank herself. At no time during the five-day trip did the steward pass her but she was either drinking a cup or asking for it.

But Jesus, Mary and Joseph, if English industry was

falling behind, the French were out of it all together, for didn't *le garçon de vin* come round with a glass of wine in return for a few francs as often as was wanted, to soften the hardships of the day? And you would have to be an animal of a different character to me, not to pass off the time drinking with a bit of a chat.

At twelve o'clock we stopped for lunch, and M. Monti would take us to a restaurant for a five-course meal. I offered to pay my share, but he told me to wait and settle up at the end of the month, and sitting there, we appreciated the comfort.

The month was beginning to feel its age when M. Monti tells me his son is returning from the army in North Africa, and for the price of my meal tickets, would I ever let him work with me and learn how to do enameling? To tell the honest truth, although the part of North Dublin I come from is as tough as any and I'd worked with numerous people, including Glasgow-Irishmen, in the house-painting trade, I would not have been so eager with my agreeing had I seen him first, for he looked the type to sit up all night with a shotgun on the odd chance of his having to use it. For all his nineteen years, he had a hard face, more like an Irish terrorist's than mine, and wore not only the French Army uniform but the sword as well.

But his family were obviously very proud of him and a party was given to celebrate his return. M. Monti welcomed me, literally with open arms, and François, the son, came over with a glass of *vin rouge* much stronger than anything I had tasted before from Metropolitan France. He told me it was called *Mascara* and that he had brought several bottles back with him from North Africa. Afterward I discovered it was sold mainly in working-class areas, and was very cheap, even for France.

But François gave me qualified approval with the glass of *vin rouge* and after a while we sat over drinking it,

codding the girls and codding one another over the girls, and then starting a singsong. Although we all joined in the folksongs, solo performances were well received, and I was encouraged to round off the evening with the singing of a few staves, in French, of Rouget de Lisle's "La Marseillaise":

"*Allons, enfants de la patrie!*
*Le jour de gloire est arrivé!*
*Contre nous de la tyrannie*
*L'étendard sanglant est levé.*"

So we all got friendly and soft-sugach drunk, and everyone friendly with everyone else, which is the happiest thing we have in this world, although not always easy or certain to come by, till I sang the last coherent melody:

"*Come, come, beautiful Eillen, come for a*
*drive with me;*
*Over the mountains, down by the fountains,*
*Up by the highways and down by the*
*byways,*
*We'll drive to Castlebar;*
*On the road there's no danger,*
*To me you're no stranger,*
*So, up like a bird on me ould jaunting car.*"

Bravo! Bravo! they all shouted and applauded vociferously. And, well-oiled, most of the guests departed. There was the noise of cars starting and shouts of who wants a lift and you move over there and take Simone on your knees and no carrying on under the rugs please, keep your hands easy I can't get her started and you're awful get out and push and then silence and there was only a few of us left.

I found myself, as often I found myself before, in an armchair, and like the other half of a family group, in an

adjoining armchair were M. Monti and his son, Francois. With an air of reproof, the sword lay at his side.

From the simplest ingredients we had made a night of gaiety. It was ever thus in France.

The next morning, I put on the overalls and began showing François how to enamel the doors, which is to put a spot of paint on and another spot of paint immediately underneath it, and join the two before the edges of the preceding spot have dried. And you have to work fast enough to complete a stretch without slapping it on, for then it just runs and is impossible to paint in the direction of the panels.

All the other fellows were enjoying watching me, for all over the house I'd noticed bad paint work, but François seemed mainly interested in his overalls. Over in the restaurant, drinking a glass of rum before dinner time, he told me in the hot weather he never wore anything under them and he hoped I wouldn't be minding.

Now I didn't give a fiddler's fugh one way or another, except that I wished it was his sister. However, *Vive la différence.*

Before the job was finished, François, ever without ambition in the painting line, announced he was taking a holiday with his girl friend, and we all subscribed heavily for the buying of two sleeping bags. M. Monti, who was not out of his mind about his son's progress at work, remained aloof from the deal on the grounds that a double sleeping bag would be cheaper. No harm to the boy. I would have joined him had the work been finished and the full amount in my pocket.

A few weeks later, and myself on a blue coach to the south, silent now as we drove on toward the sun, I fell to wondering how it is that the Parisian worker goes little on the beautiful Côte d'Azur on account of its being the playground of a gang of international millionaire loafers, for long before we came to Cannes I noticed camped along the road the tents of quite obviously ordinary French families.

I arrived in Cannes somewhat dazed, and, after stretching my legs and quenching my thirst at the Zanzi-Bar, I wished to go from that town to a place called Speracedes, A.M. There were no buses going at that hour, so I decided to do an autostop. The truck driver got out and had a look at me. He was a blocky, tough-looking man of the Midi, but smelt so strongly of expensive perfume that I thought he bathed in it.

He invited me into the bistro while we discussed arrangements. He would take me in the cab with Albert. I was not eager to go in the cab with Albert, for not only was I a little taken aback by his beautiful odors, but to be smelling the two of them on the journey would be purgatory altogether.

"You are smelling me?" said the truck driver.

"I most certainly am."

"Ah," he smiled with satisfaction, "I smell, yes?"

"Well, yes and no," said I. "I smell and you stink. A fair division of labor, like."

He took me out to his truck. "You must smell Albert," he said.

There sat Albert, a hardened old geezer who smelt like sweet Nellie Fowler, of whom it was said that young swells of the nineties used to pay her a fiver to put their handkerchiefs under her armpits for a night.

I looked round anxiously. "It's not usual," I said.

"No, perhaps not," said the perfumed lorry driver, "but sometimes that last twenty-five kilometers to Grasse is the longest and the loneliest. I must let you off before we arrive at the factory, of course."

"The factory?" I said.

"Yes, the perfume factory at Grasse. That's why we smell like this." He smiled with pride. "Albert has been retired ten years but he still has his smell. We don't require Union cards when we hold a general meeting. The delegate of the Confédération General de Travail just smells each man as he goes into the hall."

I thought the lorry driver had not a bad job, but I did not fancy smelling like that. However, to cut a long story short, I got to Grasse all right and eventually to Speracedes, where I had the best of drink and the best of food and went down to Cannes each day by car and swam in the Mediterranean.

# TWENTY-ONE

By 1951, this painter had wiped his pot clean down and fughed the brushes in, and apart from a few jobs here and there, never picked them up again. For the matter of that, I believe the last piece of organized work I was ever to do was the painting of the Hibernian Military School when it was being converted into a TB Hospital in 1952.

If I am anything at all, I am a man of letters. I'm a writer: a word which does not exactly mean anything in either the English, Irish or American language. But I have never seen myself as anything else, not even from the age of six when my mother says that when she sent me for a loaf of bread, I used to kick a piece of paper along the street in front of me so that I could read it.

But she didn't approve of my literary efforts and echoed the sentiments of an aunt of mine, who was the widow of the author of the Irish National Athem. "May God preserve us from poets and playwrights," she said. So I wrote silently; short stories, drafts of plays and many poems, and was the youngest writer included in *Nuabheirciocht*, an anthology of verse in the Irish language between 1900 and 1950.

I joined the Irish Press Association as a free-lance journalist, an occupation I was to enjoy until my retirement in 1956, following Joan Littlewood's direction, in a splen-

did cockney way, of *The Quare Fellow* and, later, *The Hostage*. She was the only producer I ever met with a spark of genius, but I also happen to remember that her theater in the East End of London, the Theatre Royal in Stratford, would have shut were it not for me. Eaten bread is soon forgotten.

In addition to my other extraordinary abilities, I'm a pretty good singer, and I've had an extensive repertoire of songs, many of which I learned from my uncle Peadar, and from my mother, who has never stopped singing. Not even the Depression could stop her. I think if somebody mentioned China, she'd sing a song about it, for no matter what anybody mentioned, she'd a song for it. And I was after doing the same, so when Michael O hAodha asked me to sing a few ballads professionally on the *Balladmakers' Saturday Night* program on Radio Eireann, it seemed an easy way of lining the coffin. I even scripted the Dublin sections myself and had a number of my short stories broadcast, some of which I read, although I never enjoyed this part of it as I consider singing your own songs or reading your own work a form of mental incest. However, every cripple has his way of walking and I was in need of the readies, for my modest expenses in the journalistic line did not take into account my capacity for hopping and skipping in France, and indeed in that other island across the way where I was still *persona non grata*, but where, for one reason or another, I would find myself on occasion.

I often had reason to go into the office of the *Irish Times* in Fleet Street, and glad of a place to sit in comfort, for I wouldn't be having more than a few pence in my pocket, and after having slept out the night in Hyde Park, it was my feet that were needing the rest. And while waiting for the man I wanted to see, I would be entertained by the man who operated the telegraphic machine to Burgh Quay in Dublin.

Among other things he told me was to be sure to see for myself the monument of love and gratitude erecred

by Queen Victoria to her consort, Albert, and in future be thankful for our own samples of British architecture in the way of memorials.

Now I was reared in the belief that the greatest disaster that ever befell mankind was the defeat of Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo. That it opened a century of unparalleled misery for the people of Ireland and that the little corporal, even at his most cynical, was a more civilized figure than the licensed thug and the loud-mouthed head bailiff, whose victories on behalf of European reaction, and the privileges of landlords, are commemorated in the Phoenix Park.

Bonaparte's royalist pretensions and imperial lunacies were more worthy of a talentless, dull race of well-to-do nail and saucepan merchants who depended upon the revelations about imported royalty to give a bit of color to their lives. And they ruined him, but at least he is remembered by the Code Napoleon and the straight roads he built.

Wellington, the made-in-Brummagen Iron Duke, if he is remembered for any law, it is the Poor Law; if for any building, it is the workhouse. As for the obelisk in the Phoenix Park, it was put there by the enemies of the people of Ireland, and should be shifted, now that they are no longer powerful enough to enforce its preservation. Neither has the Martyr of the Pillar any claim on our consideration. As Bernard Shaw said, he won victories he'd have been deservedly shot for losing, and anyway has nothing to do with us.

By now I was becoming quite well known as a writer and a broadcaster, and stories of mine appeared at the one time in the *Catholic Standard* and the *People*. I think it was working for the *People* that I found the most satisfaction, for although the democratic paper I consider sometimes dirty, it is a big seller with a circulation of over four million copies, and I was always able to get a few bar from it.

Hanner Swaffer, the most popular writer on the *Peo-*

*ple*, was a very great man. At the beginning of the war, when he was over the age of sixty-five anyway, he'd taken a flat in Trafalger Square and one of the conditions of the lease was that he had to do fire-watcher's duties. So Swaff did fire-washing duties but when the war ended, the owner of the flat asked him to leave.

"I'm not leaving," said Swaff. "I didn't even know the war was over." And to the best of my recollection he occupied the flat until the day he died.

Another very good man, in my opinion, was Robert Marie Smiley, who was the editor of the *Irish Times* and whose London office provided me with the readies and preserved the soles of my feet in the true days. And I thought a lot of him for this reason. He was from the County Sligo, the same as W. B. Yeats, and in the First World War he was interned in Berlin, where he was a music student. As an Irishman he could have been released and gone into the German parlor, as the saying has it, but he preferred to remain a British citizen. And he stopped in prison for the whole four years of the war.

It was about W. B. Yeats that I remember Smiley getting into a bit of embarrassment. He had to ring up Yeats to inform him that he had won the Nobel Prize.

"Senator Yeats," said Smiley. "Through you and to you a great honor has been paid to our country and to yourself. I have just received a cable from Stockholm telling me you've won the Nobel Prize."

And Yeats, with that fine practicality which is ever the mark of a true poet, replied: "For Jesus' sake, Smiley, pull yourself together. How much?"

Now comes this day when 1952 was beginning to feel its age. It was France versus Ireland in the football at Dalymount that year, and Smiley asked me would I ever write a color article on the match? And I was to go to France, for it was not a description of the actual play that was needed, but a description of the attitude of the Frenchman to the match. I was to be paid sufficient to

take me from the *Irish Times* office out to Dublin Airport to Paris Airport and back.

"We'll get the tickets, Brendan," said Smiley.

"Nonsense," said I, and here is where Aughrim was lost. "I'll get them myself."

There was a sign of rain on the sky this morning as I walked the few steps along Westmoreland Road and into the nearest snug, thinking that those less fortunate than myself would be having it before the day was out. Not that it is to be implied that I thought lightly of the sufferings of any worker in bad weather, but it was the way I was looking out the window and counting the blessings for myself. Outside the window and looking in was a friend of mine and our native defender in the boxing at the Olympics in 1932, Ernie Smith. I beckoned to him and Ernie, being a North Dublin fellow, was in like a shot with him. And we had a few shots and eventually three days later I appeared with enough of the money for to get me to England only, where there was still a deportation order against me.

The boat was crowded and it was a diabolical journey, but I had the good fortune to get in with a fellow from some built-up bog of London, who insisted on giving me a lift from Liverpool in his car, even if I did have to listen to him giving out the pay about the dangers of the Teddy Boys now inhabiting the place. Like most people, I had seen reports in the papers of more or less inoffensive citizens being battered unconscious by Teddy Boys, teenage boys whose uniform was an elaborate imitation of what the well-dressed man was wearing in the days of Edward the Seventh: drain-pipe trousers, long jacket with velvet collar, and what my father would call an All-for-Ireland-League MP's overcoat.

That night, I stood at a coffee stall nourishing myself with a cup of tea and a sandwich, and I watched half a dozen of these gentry devouring jellied eels. By the same token I am a great believer in sampling the local delicacies anywhere I may happen to be, but I draw a very

trim line at jellied eels. I remember Benedict Kiely telling me that they come from the bens and glens of County Antrim and that numerous canty bodies make a wheen of ha'pence on the export trade from Toomerbridge, in that County, to Waterloo Bridge, in London. I will take his word for it that jellied eels are wholesome fare for man and beast and leave it at that.

Anyway, I was at this stall at about one o'clock in the morning and these Teddy Boys seemed to be giving me searching looks. I am not notoriously a nervous type and was not reared in such a sheltered atmosphere as to feel I was slumming by going down the East End. But I was a long way from barracks and not in the humor to be asking the arm of the law for support, and while I was not less than twice the weight of any two of these anti-Parnellites, I did not feel able for taking on six of them. Besides, from Sunday reading, I had learned that the least offensive of the Edwardian armory included a bicycle chain and a blunt instrument fashioned from the strap-hanging equipment of the London Transport Board.

The most velvety Teddy Boy looked over at me at last, and said, "Eye."

"Eye," I said, learning the language apace.

"Yew Ahrish?"

I admitted as much and wondered which one of them I could drop before the belt on the back of the head. I could see the headstone in Glasnevin Cemetery, if they ever gathered up the bits and sent them home: "*Breandán O Beacháin. Coshálta chun báis ar Dhreichead* Waterloo, 1952. His memory is an example to us all to keep away from jellied eel fanciers."

The velvety Teddy Boy turned to his friends and said, "Vere. Weh did eye sye?" He smiled at me and said, "These geezers contradicted me. I knew you was Ahrish w'en I 'eard your browgue. We're all Ahrish 'ere."

Proudly he pointed out his friends. "'E's MacCarfy,

en 'e's O'Leary, en 'Ealy, en 'Ogan, en Kelly, en my name is . . . give a guess."

"Murphy."

"That's it," said he delightedly, "and my mum is a Flanagan."

"Gentlemen," said I, "I'm really pleased to hear this." And I raised my cup of tea in salute.

I remember a young lady employee of the Irish Government in London, who worked in her spare time for a Catholic youth organization, telling me once of a dance they ran which was visited by Cardinal Griffin. The cardinal and his party beamed on the young dancers, who pranced round sedately till they left, and then went into the wildest and liveliest sort of jiving. My friend commented on this to one of them and on the rapidity with which they accelerated the pace of the light fantastic once the visitors were gone.

"Well?" asked the lad indignantly. "What did you expect us to do? Be-bop in front of a cardinal? What do you take us for, 'eathens?"

In the quiet of the early morning I fell to wondering what, in the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was I going to do for the readies to get me across the Channel?

I have a sister, Carmel, who lives in Crawley, a new town in Sussex, and I got a loan from her and her Scots husband, Joe Paton, a very noble, kind man. And Joe came up to London and met me at Victoria with enough money for the trip and more beside.

It was a Sunday morning, which to an alcoholic is hell, and I bought my favorite newspaper because I got a few quid from it occasionally. With heartfelt relief, I sat at the carriage window as the train pulled slowly out of the station. The carriage was empty except for a purple shawl in the opposite corner, containing a woman of uncertain age, for it was not the season for the assmacrockery to be unloading their cats, dogs and small children on the beach and the perils of the gray sea.

I opened my paper, and by the Lord Jesus, didn't I discover that Dick Timmons, the man I had helped get off a jail sentence, had written his story of the escape? With my eyes riveted on the print, I read: "At last I got word from Liverpool. The old lady wrote to say that a man was coming to see me. When I saw who it was, I was amazed. For it was Brendan Behan, a friend who had served three years in Borstal for his part in the bombings and who had been expelled from England. He had traveled from Ireland with false papers to help me—and risked jail to do so."

By Jesus, said I in my own mind, I would give back the Six Counties and go along with the singing to get out of this one. I put my hand in the inside pocket of my coat and felt the hardness of my passport, no longer false, albeit in the name of Francis Behan, and the purple shawl opposite moved and slumped forward. And Dick Timmons, easy in his knowledge, was not in mind to be withholding any information this day.

And I read on: "We agreed to separate. The day after he went to Manchester, he was arrested and sentenced to three months imprisonment for illegal entry."

Not all the sins of my past life crowded in front of me, but as many as could get in the queue, and I wondered, with something approaching terror, whether I would ever get out of this one. I remembered too, the puckered grin of the tough old Republican veteran from West Clare, who was asked whether his fight for Ireland had benefited him personally.

"What did you get now for it all?" said a Job's comforter of an artist that I am quite sure had never spent an hour out of his bed for anyone.

"I got," and his hardy old face twisted in a grin, "forty acres off this country. Forty acres—when the tide is out."

And about the height of what I'd be getting was a further spell in the shovel-and-pick.

Under cover of the purple shawl, I went through the

barrier at Newhaven, but lost it on account of a young Irishman of the kind that would kill his mother for a spare ticket to a Radio Eireann symphony concert, giving out the pay to me about the perils of losing all belonging to you on the Newhaven-Dieppe run. All I would be losing on the run would be the threat of the deportation order and several pounds in weight thinking about it.

But luck was with me this day, for didn't this woman, with her young son, ask me if I was going to Paris and would I ever help her from the Gare Saint Lazare across to the Gare d'Austerlitz?

"Sure," I said. "We can go on a bus or in a taxi, but I'll take you anyway." And I fell in alongside her while the immigration officer looked at the passports.

"Are you Francis Behan?" said the immigration officer, and polite with it too.

"Yes," I said, "sure I am."

"You say you are a journalist. For what papers or journals have you written?"

I felt my blood go to my scalp and heard my words stammering on the air as heavy as lead. "Eerr, *Irish Times, Irish Press,* the *Irish Workers' Republic,* the *People,* and the *Fighting Carpenters' Gazette.*"

I swallowed some spit and looked him over for the first time. He was a tallish man and with a good appearance. The thin lips of an Englishman, and that was all right too —wasn't it his country to have any kind of lips he liked? If he would just stop the questioning and let me be easy in my mind. I lowered my eyes and tried to collect my utterance.

"I am on my way to France for the *Irish Times,*" I stuttered, "to write a color article on the attitude of the Frenchman to the football at Dalymount Park."

"Do you know Brendan Behan?" He spoke very reasonably, and I breathed more easily.

"Oh," I said, "a loud-mouthed bastard. I've seen him over in Dublin, but I don't know much about him."

"You don't know much about him?" said the immigration officer. His indignation got the better of him as his accent changed. "You *are* him!" he shouted into my face, grabbing me by the arm as he did so.

The woman and her son moved back a pace and both of them looked reproachfully at me.

# TWENTY-TWO

I WAS TAKEN into a little room where there was another well-dressed man, who smiled at me. Better again, he called me "Francis." Then he beckoned me to a table at the back of the room where there was a pile of photographs, and Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I nearly fell out of my standing, for didn't my photograph loom very largely among the other ones?

I brought my blood back to my feet. "For the love of God," I said, "would you ever get me a drink?"

The immigration officer grunted. "No," he said, "but we'll give you a cup of tea." He was fascinated with his capture, which apparently was the big event of the day for him. But, by Christ, not for me.

A sergeant came in carrying a tray containing a printed form, a bar of copper, a roller and a container of printing ink. The second well-dressed man spoke, "We're going to take your fingerprints, but you probably know all about that." He moved to the open door. "Come on. Down for a wash." I followed him out and he stood outside the door while I washed my hands and used the lavatory. He chatted through the door, friendly, without caring much one way or another, and in my own mind, I decided to bluff it out and be easy in return.

Back in the room, the sergeant took the form and laid it on the table and rolled ink on the bar. I gave him the

index finger on my right hand and he took it and inked it and rolled it on the form, where it left an impression in the space marked "Index Finger, Right Hand." Then he took the middle finger, the ring finger and the little finger and the same on the left hand. I signed the form, "Francis Behan" on the bottom in the space provided, and the well-dressed man smiled again.

I was taken by car up to the County Headquarters of the Sussex Police at Lewes by my friend, whom I subsequently discovered was called Johnston, and by another constable who said nothing to me one way or another. But I was treated with great politeness, and Johnston put his hand in his pocket and took out a packet of cigarettes. He handed the constable one, took one himself and then passed them to me. "Have one," he said.

"Thank you," I said and the constable passed lights all round. I could see the driver looking in his mirror all the while, taking in every feature of my face for to tell the kids at home in the evening that he had driven the bastard that helped that prisoner to escape, and reading out bits of the *People* for to illustrate the point. And the children would listen with wide-eyed astonishment and give him great credit for his prowess and the smartness of the police.

By way of diversion, we drove through Brighton. There was no beach, but a stony stretch of pebbles and the water, poised and angry, reaching away out in front of us, with no limit but the rim of the world. The car turned off past the Pavilion, built by the Prince Regent to house his mots and of no benefit to any, and we moseyed our way across the Downs to Lewes jail. The jail lay on the outskirts of the town itself, an ugly gray-flint and red-bricked building with warders' huts alongside overlooking the Downs. We went up the drive and the car eased to a halt at the main entrance.

Superintendent W. Britton came down the steps to meet us, followed by two guards who looked stern and strong as if physical assault was threatening the law and

they'd be glad to die in its defense. Johnston was out the car first, and after a hurried conversation, Superintendent Britton turned to me, even smiling as he did so, and told me I was being held for questioning as they had reason to believe I was Brendan Behan. The guards stood one each side of me and I was escorted inside.

It wasn't a bad-looking room for all that and the wallpaper had got seashells all over it, though I must say it didn't do much for the improvement of my health, nor, for the matter of that, for the inhabitants inside. I sat on a chair and I swung my legs up on the table.

"Look," I said. "You're mad. I am not Brendan Behan."

Superintendent Britton rose from his side of the table and came round toward me and spoke in an even and gentle tone.

"Now, be sensible," he said. "We know you are. We know by your fingerprints and we know by your photograph."

"All right, Superintendent, all right. I am," and the Superintendent looked reproachfully at me and then lowered his eyes as I asked, in the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for a drink. He nodded to Johnston and to a warder, who went out and returned in very short order with tea and more tea. It wasn't what I'd meant, but tea is not such a bad drink, particularly given in the spirit—I intend no pun—in which these gentlemen gave it.

And they fell to talking about Bentley, who had been charged that night with Craig, for the shooting of a policeman. Now I do not believe in the shooting of policemen, even indiscriminately, but I do not think Bentley should have been charged with murder and certainly did not deserve the death penalty, but there was a great state of agreeing going on about the right to charge him between these two on this day, and it wouldn't do to be giving out the pay at this stage of the game and downface the gentlemen, so I said, "I suppose you're right, when you come to think of it."

We went out to the top of the stairs and the turnkey came up and Britton smiled at me. "Good night, men," I said, and I followed the turnkey up the landing until we came to the cell door. I took off my shoes and braces and went inside, and the door banged out behind me and I heard the key turn in the lock.

I looked up at the barred windows. I was there again, in a concrete box. And the lavatory was there again, in the corner, in full view of the spy-hole and the John Bull bastard of a warder to look in. I lay down on the wooden bench in misery to await my doom. Monday would come soon enough.

Waking, I lay for a while wondering when I would be for court. At Manchester, the bastards of coppers had remanded me twice before sentencing me, but maybe this time they would only deport me and say, "For the love of Jesus, would you stop out of here in future." And begod, I would and be thankful.

I heard noises of key-jangling and door-banging. I knew those noises. They were coming my way. The key turned in the lock and a thin-lipped warder told me there were some gentlemen to see me. I followed him out and he pointed to my shoes and socks and braces which were laid out in the passageway, and I eagerly put them on. Johnston was having a whispered conversation with another constable, but he stopped as soon as he saw me.

"There are some men to see you, Brendan," he said, "from MI Five of Scotland Yard. But first, I'll take you down to the washhouse to get a clean-up and a shave."

"I'm not so bad," I said, rubbing my chin, but in my own mind, yes, we must be shipshape for those fugh-pigs of informers.

Afterward, I was taken to the Governor's office where we shook hands politely. The Governor was pleasant enough to me though by all accounts he wasn't very pleasant to the other prisoners. Somebody once said that a regular soldier is the scum of the earth, but by Christ,

a warder is the scum of the scum, no matter from which place they come.

His two fellow-companions from Scotland Yard smiled the smiles of the professionally polite, but their eyes remained hard with it. The one in the gray pin-striped suit offered me a cigarette, asking me at the same time what I did and all to that effect. I told him, and then I put the cigarette into my mouth to take a draw of it, when the second man came round the table toward me. "Listen Behan," he said. "I understand you have been in the IRA organization since you could walk, and you know plenty about it, but you have made no mention of that."

"What little I could tell you about the IRA," I said, "would be of no interest to you at all." And I hastily added, "And a deal sightless that you already know," for he looked the type of man who would sit up all night with a sick dog for the need of a few licks in the morning.

"That may very well be." And he spoke very reasonably, and I looked at him and something told me that neither of these ballockses of imitation policemen were as well briefed as perhaps they might have been.

Pin-stripe spoke again. "This is a serious matter, Behan. More serious than perhaps you realize. What were you doing in 1947?" It was out, and the Governor settled comfortably in his chair as if he was in the front row of the stalls about to watch a film they had all been talking about.

The smiles faded from the professional lips of MI 5 as I gave them my eye-witness account of my three months in Manchester jail, and how I was a great attender of the shovel-and-pick. "But," I smiled, "nothing else of any great interest happened in that year, unless, of course, you are referring to my coming to England on my way through to France in the summer, as I was attempting to do now? That is all I was doing, and that's about the height of it."

"You mean that that is all you're going to tell about it.

And you can take the grin off your face." Pin-stripe nodded to the other man and spoke in a quieter tone.

"You know, Behan, you can be of assistance to us over this matter."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I can't help you."

"Well, you've a few days to go before you come up for court. Think it over, and if you change your mind, let us know. One way or another, we'll find out anyway."

The interview was over, and although they let on to be unconcerned, I could tell when I left the room that they were very huffed blokes indeed. I was glad of that. And I discovered for the first time in my life that there is a degree of professional jealousy existing among the police that you wouldn't be meeting everywhere. For the Sussex police were so happy that I had screwed up MI 5, who had taken the job of interrogating me out of their hands, that their attitude toward me changed completely.

Instead of taking me back to the cell, I was put in another room, where I was brought buckets of tea and allowed to smoke many cigarettes. And the coppers kept coming in and out the room to have a chat, and it was the happiest time I ever spent in the nick. They told me about the Sussex Martyrs and how they were burned at the stake in Lewes by Bloody Mary and how they hoped I would be able to see the celebrations, on the Fifth November, which was in a few days time, for the town was great gas that night. They would take me round the district to each street and see the bonfires lit.

"You know, this is not a very popular night for Irishmen around here," they said. "We might even let you go."

"If you give me a break, I'd soon show you," I laughed, for damn it, I would have readily joined in.

It might interest those people who believe that the struggle for Irish Independence was mainly one of Catholics versus Protestants to know that Bloody Mary, a Catholic, far from being pro-Irish, was the first person to ex-

pel the ancient inhabitants of Ireland and plant men of her own choosing in their place. Furthermore, she renamed two counties in Ireland, Leix and Offaly, King's County and Queen's County, and one of the main towns of Offaly was called Philipstown after her fancy man or husband, or whoever he was, Philip II of Spain.

However, back in England she sanctioned the wholesale persecution of Protestants, including the Sussex Martyrs, which, I would say, contributed largely to the English being a Protestant people. On the whole, Mary I, Queen of England, was not a big deal.

It nearly drives me insane when I think of the opportunity I missed by not seeing Guy Fawkes Night in Lewes, but maybe with the help of God and varied, I will yet.

I was on remand for about a week, and shared a police cell with a young Australian boy—not a bad kid at that—but he put years on me giving out the pay about having to use the lavatory in public. I was sorry for the chiseler, for he was only in on some minor charge, and totally unused to hardships of this nature. For the matter of that, I never got used to it either, but I knew it was no good going on about it.

Although I had written an article about Borstal that was published in *The Bell* ten years before, I spent most of my time extending it, so that when the week got well under way, I had more or less completed the rough draft of a book. This was later to appear as *Borstal Boy*, but I rewrote it several times before the final version was published. I read bits of it to the Australian lad and his only comment, when he was not complaining about the sanitary arrangements, was, "Cor, Paddy, did you write that?"

On the day before I was due to go to court, Jack Molloy, counselor at the Irish Embassy in London, came to see me. We had not met before, and I found him a decent enough old skin. After he had asked me if there was anything he could do for me and all to that effect, he left,

giving me forty Afton cigarettes. He told me he had arranged for a Mr. Carter to defend me the following day.

I went back to my cell in good humor. Digger was sitting on the bench and I threw him the cigarettes. "Thanks, Pad," he said. "I suppose you'll be out of this drum in the morning?"

"Your turn won't be long, kid," I answered. And to cheer him up, "You've got nothing to be frightened of. Just tell them your story and stick to it. It's your first offense. You'll be out and about before you know where you are."

He said nothing, but took a cigarette and lit it, holding it in front of his nose, staring at it as if mesmerized, and the ash fell to the floor. He was still sitting there when I fell asleep.

In the morning I was brought away on my own and taken up to the charge room by a policeman to sign for my property. Then I was put in a big cell along with the other remand blokes till the court opened. There were two rough-looking customers caught on a warehouse roof, a man who had been taken off the channel boat at Newhaven trying to avoid maintaining his wife, a young boy of about fifteen who had borrowed a bicycle to get to work in time, after having it off with his mot, and a railwayman accused of raping male twins. He was weeping bitterly so I went over to him to try and console him.

"Look," I said. "For Christ's sake have a cigarette. You're not dead yet." But the poor guy took the same of it so much to heart, with all the pressure of the law against him, that he turned his head and moved away from me.

Two fresh-faced officious-looking bastards of policemen, who had been watching the proceeding, beckoned me over. The younger of them unlocked the cell and I was taken out. They explained that they had been sent down from London to take control of me, and yes, said I in my own mind, you'll not be wanting that poor old railwayman to be getting any comfort from me.

"I'd like to hear that case," I said.

"It's a very unpleasant one and we don't think you should," said the second man, who looked the type that wouldn't go away and leave the people die in peace in the time of the cholera.

"When I was sixteen, you didn't mind my hearing unpleasant cases," I snapped. "I'm twenty-nine now," and I walked away from these smart alecks, till I saw Johnston standing in the corridor.

"For the love of Jesus," I said, "will you get me away from these fughs from the big smoke? They're too smart for me."

"What's up, Brendan? Do you think they are going to get something out of you where we failed?" Johnston smiled.

"They'll get fugh-all out of Brendan Francis Behan, but to be honest with you, I would like to hear the case against the railwayman, and they have it in mind that I shouldn't."

And Johnston, to spite the London cops, for I don't think he intended for me to watch the proceedings, took me into the court.

The magistrate was a woman, a "gentle English Tory," which, to me, is like talking about a tame cobra, dry water, a poor publican or a tame duck, and she had a face like Harris tweed. When the prosecuting attorney said that he didn't think this was a nice case for a lady to hear, out like a shot with her she replied, it was all right. "In the line of duty," she explained. Actually I think she was as eager as myself to be hearing it.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, they gave this poor unfortunate railwayman treatment that you would not be expecting if you were in Algeria under the paratroops, or a Jew under the Nazis. Quite obviously he could have been overwhelmed by the two kids he was accused of raping, but their stepfather put on a great act of indignation in the witness box and he was believed. If I had had my way, the twins would have had their arses slapped and

sent home. Instead of which, the "gentle English Tory" sent the railwayman up for trial.

I followed him into the dock and was charged with illegally entering England, which I must say was a bit much when, at the time, I was attempting to leave it. However, I pleaded guilty, and then Superintendent Britton gave evidence that I had been expelled at Liverpool for being found with explosives in suspicious circumstances in 1941, and that later I had served four years of a fourteen-year sentence for attempting to murder Irish police officers. The old lady on the bench listened intently, but she was polite enough when she spoke.

Then Mr. Carter buttered her up with all sorts of nonsensical tales of how I had been led away by joining the IRA at the age of fourteen, but now I was no longer concerned with subversive activities, but a well-known writer and broadcaster on Radio Eireann, and was merely passing through England on my way to Paris, where I had legitimate business. This softened her cough, and she smiled at me, and so did other people in the court, as she fined me fifteen pounds, although I had to pay the costs as well. I could not complain about my treatment at Lewes.

Afterward I followed the sergeant into the car, for I was to be escorted to Newhaven, where I was to catch the cross-channel boat to France. On the way through Lewes, I remarked on the buildings in that town, for they looked the height of good architecture to me.

The sergeant greeted my account of metropolitan majesty from the High Street to Newhaven with "oh" and "ah" but for the best part he remained silent. No harm to him. A shut mouth catches no flies.

I was taken through customs, and if the tallish immigration officer with the thin lips of an Englishman recognized me he too kept his mouth shut. At the gangway, I shook hands with the sergeant.

"Mind yourself, Brendan," he said.

I turned round in astonishment. There was no mistaking the accent.

"You're a Dublin man," I called after him, for although I had met plenty of Liverpool-Irish, and a more fiendish shower of bastards it would be hard to find, it was unusual for a man from my native city to join the British police, who for the most part, were an ignorant body of men.

He ignored my remark but merely raised his hand, and I walked up the gangway shouting, "It's a pity you didn't learn more sense." He was an Irishman, of the variety best known to me, who would be happily absorbed in the problem of seeing whom he could do next.

The boat was crowded, but two light youths sitting together moved over a bit and invited me to sit down. I realized, with something approaching horror, that what with paying the fine and costs, all I had left of the readies was an Irish threepenny piece.

It was France versus Ireland in the football at Dalymount the very next day, and what in the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary was I going to do for the readies, if I was to write a color article on the match? Then I remembered Desmond.

Immediately on arrival in Paris, I went up to Desmond's pad, and he set me up at a hotel at the back of the Luxembourg Gardens. That night we sat outside a café and talked after dinner far into the soft November evening and past midnight, until the cold drove us indoors again.

The next day, in the bar of the hotel, I tried to listen to the match on the wireless, but it would have to be a linguist of a different variety to me, to understand the French commentator's description of the match. The roar, the bawl, the yell, were the same in any language, and hadn't I as a chiseler and later too given good account of myself from the sideline, and nobody I met ever begrudged the noise?

Now I wondered at the sour looks on the faces of the

Frenchmen in the bar, and when their curses became directed at me, I realized the match was over and we had won. Naturally I was delighted, but the reaction in the bar was, to me, completely incomprehensible. The following morning I read in a newspaper that "the Dalymount roar frightened the French team so much that they lost their nerve and also the match."

# TWENTY-THREE

IT WAS LATE afternoon before I had recovered sufficiently enough to amble round to the *Irish Times* office in Westmoreland Street to see Robert Smiley. I had decided, after I'd a few glasses of whiskey in me, to tell him the truth, for in the main, I only told lies in the way of business, to get a drink and a feed or the price of my keep, to humble and simple souls, and Robert Smiley was neither of these.

"You'll kill yourself more with the drink than ever you will with the IRA, Brendan," he said, as I walked into the room. I respected him greatly for this and the matter was discussed no further. Instead we fell to talking about a certain respectable member of the aristocracy who had spent a week trying to persuade W. B. Yeats to get out and fight in Easter Week, 1916. Legend had it that Yeats asked her what did she take him for, said he was too delicate a man, and threw her down the stairs two days after the fall of the General Post Office, because he was going to write a poem about it.

At one time she had been on the Committee of International Red Aid, and she always insisted on giving this organization its full name, in case it would be mistaken for the Irish Republican Army. She had fallen out with the IRA in 1934 on the general question of the day-to-day struggle, and the particular one of their refusal to

spare a dozen twelve-ounce sticks of gelignite for a parcel to be sent to the Secretary of the Employers' Federation during the coal strike.

Described as a champion of the downtrodden in every land, a fiery preacher for every good cause in her native land—the breaking-up of the big estates, the revival of the Irish language and birth control—a splendid figure of revolting womanhood, she was believed to have been instrumental in getting Frank Harris and Charlie Chaplin to visit Jim Larkin in Sing Sing. She certainly used her influence with Governor Al Smith to get him out. Smith had an almost feudal regard for her on account of her family having evicted his family out of their cottage in County Cavan, back in the old days.

"I suppose you wouldn't know those parts, Brendan?" said Smiley.

I knew them well and have friends there, and I knew Ballyjamesduff, and if I didn't know Lappanduff Mountain, I knew the song about it and heard it first sung in a bar on the Falls Road in Belfast.

*On Cavan's mountain, Lappanduff,*
*One fought with bravery,*
*Until the English soldiers shot*
*Brave Séan MacCartney . . .*

Cavan of the little hills. For Cavan, the man said, you turn right at Navan. This happens to be true. I've done it.

We left the office together in the height of good humor, and by way of no harm we called in at Michael's for a drink. But Smiley, ever an abstemious man, flew on the one wing and, after a half of stout, was off home. At the door, he turned and handed me an envelope.

I went into the "jacks" and opened it. Inside was a blue ten-pound note and I put it in my pocket. Good man, I said to myself, but aloud, "Now aren't you the great sport, Robert Marie Smiley!"

I went back to the bar.

"The same again, Michael," said I, "and a drink for yourself."

"Thanks," said Michael.

I threw down the tenner.

"A blue one, bejasus!" said Michael. "Your blood's worth bottling."

And there was great respect going on in the bar that evening for Brendan Behan. Doctor Crippen made room for me on the one side and McIntaggart the other side of me. McIntaggart's name in Irish is *Mac an tsagairt*, or "son of the priest." Some tease from Connemara told him this, and since then he'd gone round the gullible public with the tale that he was the son of a bloody priest. Not that anyone in this public house would believe the Lord's Prayer from his mouth. If you asked McIntaggart the time, you'd check it on the telephone.

Doctor Crippen's real name I did not know. He got his nickname from the time he was a barman in a Free State Army canteen and was said to have poisoned the soldiers with bad drink. It was said that the man killed more that way than the IRA, whom they were fighting at the time.

Crippen, in his day, was a sergeant-major in the Free State Army, and played Gaelic football for the Army Metro, who were drawn from the barracks of the Dublin Metropolitan Garrison. Michael, the publican, respected him greatly for his former glory on the football field, but Crippen did not know this. He was a gentle person and the only thing I knew him to boast about was his association with a literary magazine and his friendship with the associate editor.

The editor was a little left-wing Republican from an island in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of West Cork. He began writing when he came out of jail in the twenties and Ireland had still the vogue among the English writing and reading class, on account of the Black and Tans putting Ireland on the Liberal conscience. Like all

the other peasant writers, he was an ex-schoolmaster and wrote lovingly about simple folk of his native place. I could make neither head nor tail of anything he wrote, and this editor suspected as much. He did not like me for it, nor any of my bits of short stories would he publish.

But the associate editor, a big, hardy boy who had boxed for Trinity College, was one of the gentlest people that I have ever met. He was a Protestant clergyman's son and had a mania for backing horses. This was shared by Crippen, who adored him, and Crippen was forever recalling the memory of his friend, now working for the BBC in London.

As I had just come back from England, he asked me, as I knew he would, how his friend was ever since? I told the assembled company my story and, for the most part, I told the truth, at the same time giving good account of myself.

Hours later, blinking into the night, I directed my gaze toward my kip, and as I made the long journey home, I fell to thinking that it was not every day in these weeks I get a bit of respect in this town. It might never happen again.

At this stage of the game, what pennies I had, and there were not a deal of them, came from my bits of articles, short stories, poems and radio scripts. I originally wrote *The Quare Fellow* under the title *Casadh Súgáin Eile*, or in English, *The Twisting of Another Rope*, after Douglas Hyde's play, *The Twisting of the Rope*, and it was first written as a radio script. Later I turned it into a one-act play and submitted it to the Abbey Theatre, who rejected it, saying that one day I might write a play. Goddammit, you might as well be out of this world as out of the fashion, for didn't Joyce and O'Casey have their plays rejected one time? I extended it to three acts and wrote the same play in English, for although I didn't agree with him, I remember a screw from Cork telling me in Liverpool that to read and speak Irish would not do you a deal of good in these times.

"What good is it anywhere outside a few in Ireland?" he said.

In English or Irish, I knew I'd wait years to be read in Dublin, but I sent it back to the Abbey and this time the manager suggested that I meet the producer to see if it would be possible to make it stageable. He explained that as I had based the play on the twenty-four hours preceding the execution of a man for carving up his brother, any one of the warders up in Mountjoy might choose to recognize himself and bring a libel action.

Fugh the producer, I said in my own mind. We don't speak the same language. I took it back, waited a few weeks, and submitted it again. Back like a shot it came, and prompt with it too. Like Joyce, I put it aside and went on with my other writing.

By now I was well known in the writing game, and as the Irish have great *meas* for the traveler, I decided to write a detective story about Dublin's underworld, but using my knowledge of France, which was by now considerable, as the background. I wrote it under the phony name of Emmet Street, which is the name of the street opposite the one I was reared in, in North Dublin, partly because around the fashionable area of Grafton Street the Dublin intelligentsia still regarded me as a writer of pornography and partly because the district around Emmet Street is famous for another reason.

Beside Emmet Street is Rutland Street, where formerly lived a man who was later President of the Irish Republic, Séan T. Kelly. But he lived in a whole Georgian house, whereas the rest of the street was mostly tenements. In a back room in one of these lived Matt Talbot, and after his death there was a move on to make him a saint. But Séan O'Casey, who came from that area and lived only a couple of hundred yards from him, refers to him as "Mad Talbot." Not only in matters of the theater, but also in matters appertaining to Dublin, do I bow to the expert.

Matt Talbot, the poor fellow, was some kind of a

drunkard until he was about twenty, although I don't think he drank all that much. He himself said that among other things he did to get the drink was to steal the fiddle from a blind fiddler. When he went off the drink, and a big song and dance was made about his conversion from liquor, he got religion in a big way, and for years he used to go to Mass every morning at five o'clock.

He worked in timber yards round the docks as a casual laborer, and any time in the timber yards he was able he would go through all sorts of religious exercises and slink off behind the pile of wood to say his prayers. He also refused his overtime on the grounds that the time spent waiting for the lorries and trucks to come in for unloading should be set against his overtime, a fallacious piece of reasoning if ever there was one, because despite the fact that he wasn't actually unloading timber, he wasn't exactly standing at the bar of the Shelbourne Hotel either, waiting there in the cold and damp of a winter's day, and the winds of the Liffey blowing through the shipyard.

And he starved himself too. It is said that he used to cook herring each day, and he would boil it up and give it to the cat, drinking the liquid himself. In 1926, on his way to church, he fell and died and was taken into Jervis Street Hospital. When the nuns came to undress him in hospital, they discovered that he had chains cutting into his bare flesh to mortify his passions, such as they were. I wouldn't be thinking you could work up a deal of passion on herring water.

However, he became something of a saint, but not to the majority of the population in his own area around the North Side. But he had a very saintly reputation among the middle and upper classes, and even a Presbyterian timber contractor said he was a great man. For the matter of that, I've no doubt that a Protestant timber contractor, or a Mohammedan, or a Jewish, or an atheist timber contractor, would all consider a man a saint if he refused his overtime. He was setting a good example to

the rest of the men. However, the majority of his neighbors agreed that if Matt Talbot had had a wife and ten children he could not be affording to refuse his overtime. That was about the height of it.

There are two life stories written about him. One was written by Joseph Glyn, who was a prominent Catholic layman and collaborator, and became Sir Joseph Glyn on account of his being one of the few Catholic members of the Dublin Corporation to join in a vote of welcome to King Edward VII when he came to visit Dublin. But he was regarded by a great many people as a "Castle Catholic," a particularly detested breed in Ireland, and was considered a very fortunate man to get through the War of Independence with his life.

At the time he wrote his life story of Matt Talbot, trade unionism was still not respectable, and he boasted how Matt Talbot was against the general strike of 1913 when the employers of Dublin were widely attacked, even at meetings in London at the Albert Hall, by various British intellectuals, including H. G. Wells, and I will mention our own Bernard Shaw.

During the strike William Martin Murphy, who was the biggest employer in the city and even owned the tramlines in Manchester and in Cape Town, as well as the *Irish Independent* newspaper, incited the Dublin Metropolitan Police Force to go in and attack the people in the tenements on the North Side. As a result of this wanton attack two people died during a baton charge in O'Connell Street.

For this brutality the Dublin Metropolitan Police were known as the "Dublin Cossacks," and the name has stuck to such an extent that even today they are referred to as this. Despite the Gaelic inscriptions they wear on their caps, they are as much hated on the North Side as when they wore crowns on their caps.

But, according to Joseph Glyn, Matt Talbot held himself aloof from all this strife and averted his eyes from the

placards that carried reports of the executions of the 1916 leaders. He certainly did not sympathize with his own people. However, times change, and in his latest biography, written by a woman from the County Kilkenny —a schoolteacher and probably a farmer's daughter who could not possibly have known anything at all from family tradition about 1913 or 1916—it appears that Matt Talbot was a staunch trade unionist, trade unionism having become sort of respectable by now.

My father, who is president of the Painters' Union, was once asked in a television interview in Ireland whether he considered Matt Talbot a great trade unionist.

"He was a trade unionist," he replied, "when he had to be."

So this unfortunate wretch, for that was all he was, was held up as an example to the Dublin worker. Whether the employers wanted all the Dublin workers to boil up herrings and give them to the cat and only drink the water, and send their surplus wage, if any, to the foreign missions, I do not know. But in any event, Matt Talbot in his own area was and is widely detested.

In 1932 the Catholic Church granted Ireland the International Eucharistic Congress, which meant an influx of perhaps a million Catholics from all over the world into the city, and very good for business.

And for once in a way, Ireland begets very little from the Church. The French atheists have Lourdes and the Portuguese, Fatima, where it is said that three little peasant girls saw the Blessed Virgin in 1917, and that she made numerous prophecies about Communism and told them a secret, which as far as I can see will never be revealed.

It is also alleged that on the first anniversary of this apparition, the sun shot out of its usual place and ran all over the sky. How this could happen and be observed by the thousands of people attending this religious cere-

mony and not be recorded in the observatories all over the world, which have the sun watched twenty-four hours a day, I really don't know.

However, just before the start of the Congress in Dublin, there was great tidying up going on in Dublin, and house painters could not be got for love nor money. And there was this contractor who was asked by Canon MacArgle, the Canon Gargle of my childhood, if he would ever do up Matt Talbot's room in Rutland Street and leave it exactly as it was when he was in it. So this contractor approaches my father, and knowing my father's rather sketchy ideas about religion, he impresses on him the seriousness of the job, and my father agrees to do it.

He strolled round to Rutland Street, and after knocking a deal on the door of his room in one of the tenements, he himself turned the handle and found it locked. But all was not lost, for didn't a woman, on hearing the noise, come to her door to find out if the devil himself was in the building? My father asked her if she would ever be knowing how to get into Matt Talbot's room?

"For Jesus' sake," she said, "I am trying to rear eight children in one room and my husband is unemployed. Do you think I've nothing better to worry me than Matt Talbot, that old *omadaun?*"

So my father explained that he had a job to do, and that if he did up the room there'd be thousands coming to see it during the Eucharistic Congress, and that she'd be doing herself a good turn by setting up a little stall outside the door and selling holy pictures and other tokens of her religious respect. Out like a shot with her, she gave him the name and address of the landlord.

"Don't mention that old bastard to me," moaned the landlord. "I can't let that fughing room because people are afraid he might appear like a ghost, clanking his chains."

"You'll make enough of the readies and more be-

side," said my old one, "if you stick a collection box in a prominent enough position in the room. Then all the people who come to pay homage to the unfortunate lunatic will think it's for the foreign missions or something and weigh out heavily. You needn't put anything on the box, so nobody can accuse you of lying or embezzling."

So the landlord thought this was a good idea and my father the greatest of men, and he gives him the key. And my father, on finally opening the door of Matt's room, nearly passes out in a weakness on discovering that his bed, which is famous throughout the annals of Catholic hagiography, is missing.

"Oh, it's you again," says the woman in the next-door room, and my father after complimenting her on her eight fine children, and all to that effect, asks about the missing bed.

"Ah, sure," she replied, " 'twas only a block of timber. We burned it during the bad winter of 1931. Mr. Behan, jewel and darlin', 'twas either that or the hall door."

"You'd better get some kind of a bed, Stephen," said the contractor. He had gone with my father to the pub nearby for a sup or two of the plain porter and was glad of a few minutes' chat. "The best thing you can do," he said, "is to go down to T. and C. Martin's and see if they might sell you something that looks like his bed."

Off he went to the timber yard, and Jesus, Mary and Joseph, didn't he find a lot of railway sleepers off the Great Northern Railway which would exactly do the trick? He picked out one, and after arranging with the foreman to have four inches taken off the top of it for removal of the bolt holes, he asked for it to be delivered up at Rutland Street.

Duly delivered it was, and the woman told him she would never be believing that it wasn't one and the same that had burned so beautiful in the bad cold of that win-

ter, as she showed him where the poor bastard lay. And even my father was charmed with himself as he chose the most abominable-looking holy pictures from a little Catholic repository for to stick around the place. They were all printed in Belgium, mostly by Communists, and were of the Little Flower and the Little Lamb and the Holy Family and the like.

He locked up the room and forgot all about Matt Talbot and went off working round the city, and he worked so much overtime that he was able to pay the publican at the corner of Gardner Street, Thomas Hogan, the forty pounds that he owed him. Poor Hogan nearly dropped dead on seeing the readies; he nearly had a heart attack. But he gave my father a glass of whiskey on the head of paying the debt, and I think he had two for to revive himself.

The most elaborate preparations took place for the Eucharistic Congress, and in our street was a banner showing St. Patrick with green whiskers on the one side and "God Bless Our Lord" on the other; a theological complication if ever there was one. But I remember the Congress well because I sang in the choir of nine hundred at the children's Mass, as did John McCormack. And it was certainly good for trade, and the pubs, which were full of foreigners of all descriptions, were open all night to the best of my recollection.

My father, like most Irish people being ever friendly with foreigners, though not to say nosy, spoke to many of them, and there was this night in the local when a man, who had a certain amount of English, tells him that Dublin is a wonderful place and that he has just had a great experience.

"Is that so?" says my old man. "Were you in Becky Cooper's, or Nell Hayden's, or Harriet Butler's?"

"Are they convents?"

"Of a sort," my father chuckled, and then he explained to him that they were brothels.

"Oh, no! No, no!" replied the visitor. "Not that kind of experience! A spiritual experience, and I have here a relic to prove it." And he proceeded to take out a clean white handkerchief from which fell a tiny chip of timber. And my father nearly fell out of his standing. "A chip of timber? A relic?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said the foreigner in hushed tones. "'Tis from the Blessed Man's bed itself. Matt Talbot."

"You, my friend, must be mad," said my father. "It's a piece of a railway sleeper, and I wouldn't be minding only it's a Protestant railway sleeper off the Great Northern Railway!"

Luckily the foreigner did not understand, so my old man decided not to press the point. After all, it was helping the country's economy.

But to get back to the Emmet Street by which I signed my name. I sent the first draft of the detective story, which I called *The Scarperer*, to Smiley, and although he agreed to publish it in the *Irish Times*, he did not feel able, at this stage of the game, to pay me an advance on it.

I went to Kilmurvey on the big Aran Island to finish it, and although I ran short of the readies and had to wire to Smiley to this effect, not without success, I was also privileged to attend one of the best hooleys ever I was at.

Máire Conghaile had guests of half a dozen European nationalities there, and I take the liberty of having been real proud of her cooking. As well they might, for I'm a fair judge, well used to the good grub and knacky manipulation of sauce and meat by my mother, who cooked at one time for Maud Gonne MacBride.

The first installment of *The Scarperer* appeared on October 19, 1953, and I was back in my native city in and around the pubs in the fashionable area of Grafton Street. For God send, if you don't get downtown, you'd hear nothing.

And it was the Dublin intelligentsia who fell to talking

about Emmet Street, some of whom knew him but the more didn't, and for once in a way I did not get in on the act. It was sufficient to know, although not out of their mind about me, they liked Emmet Street, and when pressed, I will even drink with nobility.

# TWENTY-FOUR

EVERYBODY KNOWS what they mean when they talk about a working man. It means someone that does things that are dirty, boring, dangerous or all three. When I was a child they used to say talking about an artist working is like talking about a priest working. If it is so obvious that a priest is also a worker, why in the name of Jesus do they have to keep rubbing it in? You never heard anyone emphasizing the fact that a docker is a worker and you never heard anyone saying, "Oh, a coal miner is a worker too, you know."

But we can't all be artists. Someone has to do the ordinary work of the world. Now, since I've been in the house-painting line, I've done a bit of both. And not alone did I get paid for working, but I also got paid "wet time," which is the money you get when you are not able to work during the rain, a not infrequent occurrence in the British Islands. And I was discussing these things one time with some students in a bar.

"Surely you want to take part in the world's work?" they asked.

"No," I replied truthfully. "I've resigned till they get automation."

So the ginger-headed youth of about twenty looked shocked. "You're an anarchist," he said.

"Excuse yourself," I replied. "Don't call me an anarch-

ist. I won't be insulted. I have a brother who is an anarchist in London, which means singing Red songs to the amused toleration of the police. And they get on the Third Program of the BBC too. Revolutionary, romantic and respectable. That's London anarchism. You can get in with millionaires' daughters and all, but they are one breed of bastards I don't fancy. They remind me of the Salvation Army."

"Maybe you like the Party?" said ginger-top.

"I like them well enough in Ireland, but I don't know would I like them if I was in Russia. They're never done talking about work for the working class and more production. Everyone wants the poor bloody working class to work, the Russians included. They'd even make me work if I was there, I suppose. But I'm all for them here. They frighten the other craw-thumpers and the Government. All the big-bellied bastards that I hate, hate the Reds. Catholic, Protestant, Orange, Green Trinity College, the National University, the Racing Board, the Committee for Civil Liberties, Ulster Conservatives, New Statesmen, Freemasons and the Knights of Columbus, all hate the Reds.

"But I also hate the Reds individually. They are snobbish and ill-mannered and if you haven't a job and aren't looking for one, they have no time for you."

So this surprised the students. "Snobbish?" they asked incredulously.

"Sure. They wouldn't give anyone a free trip to Russia except he had an education and owned an estate. The last delegation they sent was three-quarters well-off Protestants, and the Chinese nearly shot them because they couldn't be kept out of the British Legation looking for tea and a read of the *Daily Mail.*

"And they are ill-mannered because if you mooch into a pub on the cripple and crutch, the touch, looking for a drink, they ignore you on account of your being a parasite."

"You're an individualist," said a long-haired youth disguised as a poet.

"Wasn't Christ?" I replied. "But I don't really give a damn about Christ. Besides being the only man you've ever met that wouldn't take honest employment at trade union wages, I have another distinction. I'm the only person I've ever heard that is superstitious and not religious. I am a daylight atheist. Only in the night, or if I am very ill, do I favorably consider the claims of religion. In the daylight and in good health I consider that Christ went in for a lot of rubbish. Why can't we just walk around enjoying ourselves and have a drink and a sit-down and a feed and a bit of the other?

"A job is death without the dignity. Death always has dignity. Maybe dying hasn't much dignity but once dead, man becomes defiant. You can no longer frighten him."

There was this man standing at the bar and he came across to me.

"I have been listening to you," he said, "and I don't altogether know what some of your statements mean."

"Neither do I," I replied in all sincerity, "but I had to say something to those bastards."

So he insisted that we go to his home. Now I've always known that to take a person home when he's a little bit drunk is to indicate that you are the man responsible for his being drunk, so I was uneasy in my mind as we walked up to the door of his house in Morehampton Road. We went into the front room and there was an old lady, whom I came to dearly love, listening to the BBC Third Program, and another lady who didn't show any appreciation of my taking her husband home. There was a little girl doing her school homework, who was going to be my sister-in-law later on, and then there was a girl who walked out the door as we came in.

"Excuse me, miss," I said, but she was out like a shot with never a word in reply.

"Good night, miss," I shouted at her. "I don't know you, neither do I want to know you." And ever nimble on my feet in those times, I was back on the road again, breathing fresh air, but angry with it too.

A while later, I was asked by some more civilized person to a party in Clontarf Castle, and it was a good hooley too, with plenty of the hard stuff and a bite to eat. And the night was well overage when this very girl comes across to me. "I'm Beatrice," she said.

"No," I said. "I don't want to speak to you and I don't want to see you. You're a bourgeois swine and I don't like people like that," but to tell the honest truth, I could have bitten off my tongue the moment I said it, for she turned away and someone told me she was in tears. Now I am not that much of a savage that I like to see anyone in tears, so I went across to her.

"Look," I said, "I'm sorry if I upset you, but why are you in tears?"

"Why did you speak to me like that in front of everyone?" she asked sadly.

"And why did you behave to me the way you behaved up at your house, in front of your family?"

She lowered her eyes. "Because I was shy," she said.

So I apologized again and said I did not mean to insult her and all to that effect, and we made a date. And I remember on our very first date I asked her would she ever have the loan of a pound?

So we went to some pub on the outskirts of Dublin and we drank her pound and I suppose I tried to seduce her, when she tells me about this other fellow, Jim, whom she is thinking of marrying. Yes, said I in my own mind, but it won't be this day, nor the next.

And we left it at that. And although I saw her from time to time afterward, it was not until 1954 that we really saw a deal of each other.

Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift had started at the Pike, a tiny back-lane theater seating from sixty to sev-

enty people and I had sent them my play, *The Twisting of Another Rope*. I was doing bits of articles by the week for the *Irish Press* at the time, a most healthy state of affairs and as good a reason as ever for paying my respects to the city of London.

It is difficult to believe that that city is named after a Celtic god, Lud, whose name survives today, unchanged, in Ludgate Circus, near Saint Paul's, and in a public house called the King Lud, hidden beneath the towering bulk of Wren's masterpiece.

Now this day I was talking with Joe and Kathy McGill, with whom I was staying in London, when the phone rang and Joe called me over. It was Carolyn Swift. She and Alan had read my play and offered me a production of four weeks at the Pike.

"For God's sake, Carolyn, how much?" I asked, echoing Yeats's sentiments.

"Thirty pounds," she replied, "but we want to change the title to *The Quare Fellow*."

"For thirty pounds you can change the title to any bloody thing you like," I laughed. I put down the receiver, and far into the night the three of us lifted pints in the name of the Celtic god Lud, and so far round they went, like a five-naggin bottle at a wake, it was forgotten who first provided them.

In the morning I left for France. And she looked much the same as usual, except for the fact that the Métro had gone up thirty francs and the government of Mendés-France was getting a little less abuse than previous governments. Thirty francs was about eightpence at the time, and for a short journey was rather dear. But once you bought your ticket, you were at liberty to go anywhere the Métro went, and it would take you right from one end of the city to the other.

The first thing one learns on visiting Paris is that it is not what it was. I was told that some years ago, and for the first time, was able to pass that remark to some Irish students half a generation younger than myself. I did

not really believe it, though things were a bit dearer. A hotel room was five hundred francs a night, which was about ten shillings, and not much, if you think in terms of Galway race week, but twice as much as six or seven years before.

Old Raymond Duncan was either dead or in America. The Bonapartist, who used to march along the Boulevard Saint-Germain in his long coat and cocked hat, was no longer in evidence; nor was Confucius, the old Chinaman, whom Jeus christened God.

But the Pergola was still open, *jour et nuit*, and its proprietor, still large and affable and very wide awake behind the bar, though he could hardly have got a sleep since the last time I was there.

He remembered me and shook me warmly by the hand when I want in. He asked me how long I expected to be around this time? I told him I was off to the Riviera in the morning, and he smiled even more cordially and did not seem at all upset at the prospect of my departure after so short a visit. He remembered me, all right.

In the South I reacquainted myself with Ralph Cusack, swam in the sea at Cannes and acquainted myself with Sugar Ray Robinson, who was knocking up a bit in the Hollywood nightclub at Juan-les-Pins.

But time waits on no man and I wanted to be on that other island across the way for the rehearsals of *The Quare Fellow*. I had to go back to Paris and be up early for the boat train in the morning, and I walked in sweet melancholy from the Avenue de l'Opéra toward the Behan HQ situated in the Rue de Charenton near, and appropriately, some may think, the Place de la Bastille. My way lay through the edge of the market districts, where I had spent many a happy sunrise, and I joined some porters I knew in a cup of coffee. But British Railways wait on no man either.

At Saint Lazare Station, I need hardly say, I very nearly missed the train. I had lost the ticket of my luggage. You wouldn't get much for the lot in Cole's Lane,

but my typewriter was among the scrap. I was arguing as best as I could to get it back before the train left, when a young clerk came up and asked me where I was from. I said Ireland and his face lit up as he bustled about.

"Syracusecque," he muttered. "Syracusecque," and came back with the luggage and ten minutes to spare.

"Syracusecque," he said in triumph, and shook my hand.

"The same to you," said I, and was on the train and half way to Rouen, when I figured out that this incantation referred to Cyril Cusack, latest hero of the theater-going population of the city behind me.

'Twas the Playboy himself procured my release.

If I say it, as one who shouldn't, *The Quare Fellow* got good notices, and was pretty well packed for the twenty-eight performances, and I stood there thinking of my uncle, Paddy J. Bourke, and the times I had watched him performing in his own melodramas and in the plays of Dion Boucicault.

On the last night of my play, Beatrice came to the show with Jim and her father. I sang a stave or two off-stage, afterward I invited Jim and herself and her father, who had a car at the time, out for a few sups.

And we went to a pub on the docks, where you could drink after hours, called Tommy English's, and we stayed there until about three o'clock in the morning. But it was a particularly lousy situation, because when Jim was after telling me that he thought my play was marvelous, I wanted to say that I thought his girl friend was marvelous.

Instead, when Jim was setting up a round, I fixed myself up with her for the next Sunday, but her father got so jarred that night that, when he drove us home, I thought all I'd ever be seeing was a kip of mud in the bottom of the Liffey.

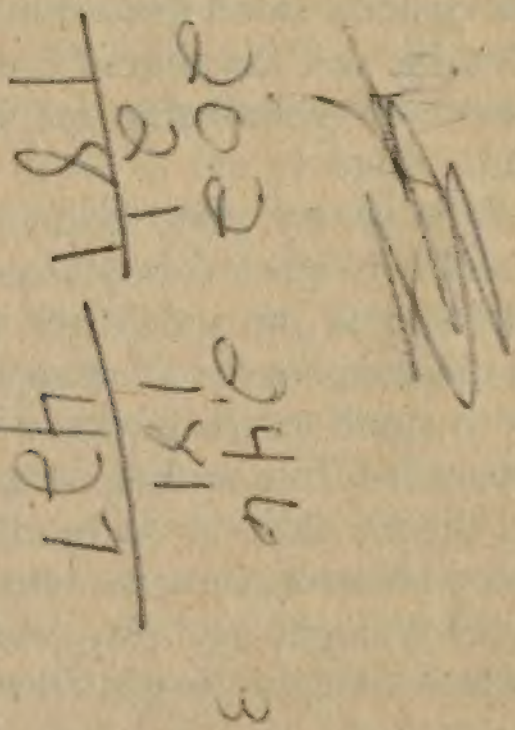
After this, we went to race meetings and parties together, and a few shows. I remember on one occasion going to see Sam Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, which

Alan and Carolyn also produced at the Pike Theatre, and I, happy with my luck, had had a few jars. And when one of the tramps in the play shouts out, "But when you're dead, who'll pull the rope?" I shouted back from the stalls, "I will." And there's much laughter going on in the audience in the middle of this deadly serious play.

"Look, Beatrice," I said in a low voice, wondering what to say that wouldn't be embarrassing her further "you know, I'm really respectable."

"I don't care whether you're respectable or not," she whispered back. "I just happen to like you."

So we were married in the Church of the Sacred Heart at Donneybrook, on Wednesday, the fifteenth of February, 1955, and she has indeed liked me from that day to this.



# CONFESSIONS OF AN IRISH REBEL

## BORN TO BE A REBEL...

...IN AND OUT OF JAIL FROM HIS FIFTEENTH BIRTHDAY, BRENDAN BEHAN KNEW NOTHING BUT TROUBLE IN HIS TOO-SHORT LIFE... AND GLORIED IN IT. HE TRAVELED FROM BED TO PUB TO PRISON, SAMPLING ALONG THE WAY THE LIFE OF A PIMP, A PORNOGRAPHER, A HOUSEPAINTER AND A SMUGGLER, AND TAKING EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO TWEAK THE NOSE OF AUTHORITY. A MAN LIKE HIM COMES ALONG BUT ONCE IN A LIFETIME; IT WILL BE OUR SAD LOSS IF WE NEVER KNOW ANOTHER...

"A PROFANELY JOYOUS BOOK AND A WELCOME REAPPEARANCE OF THE BORSTAL BOY."
—VIRGINIA KIRKUS